

The Peoples of the British Isles

A New History

Fourth Edition

Thomas William Heyck

Meredith Veldman



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British Isles

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For Bill*

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Preface

The purpose of this book is to tell the story (or rather, stories) of the peoples of the British Isles in the most recent period. It is a great story, full of drama and relevance to the history of the United States. The book is meant to be different from the conventional English history textbooks in two ways. First, it covers *British*—and not just English—history. Second, it takes as its central focus the lives of all the peoples of the British Isles, not just those of the political elite. Because England has long been the largest and most powerful country in the British Isles, English history will receive the most coverage. Indeed, one of the main themes of British history in the modern period has been the expansion of English power and influence within the British Isles. But Wales, Scotland, and Ireland have in the last fifty years or so become the subjects of vital, growing, and fascinating historiographies that demand the attention of students of British history. The histories of the peoples of what came to be called “the Celtic fringe” often had much in common with the history of the English, but at times they diverged sharply. To study comparatively the development of the different societies in the British Isles often throws new light on seemingly well-known events. Moreover, the Welsh, Scots, and Irish were often problems for the English, but the English were problems for them as well. To treat the Celtic peoples as mere intrusions into the English story yields not only a deformed historical account of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland but also an incomplete history of the British Isles as a whole.

Cultural, economic, and social, history form the backbone of this account. The book thus follows the most exciting trends in recent historiography. When dealing with national politics, the book offers analysis of the structure, functions, and impact of the political system as it evolved rather than a detailed narrative. It places international, parliamentary, and party politics in the context of the whole way of life of the peoples of the British Isles. The focus, then, throughout is on the lives of real people—how they made a living, how they organized their society and institutions, how they related to each other individually and in groups, and how they understood themselves and their world. What was it like to be a farm laborer in the English Midlands in the 1690s, a Highland clansman in the 1760s, or a worker

in a Lancashire textile factory in the 1890s? How did middle-class men and women in the 1850s understand class and gender—and how did those understandings change by the 1950s? How did the long period of unemployment in the 1920s and 1930s affect popular culture? What was the impact of total war in the twentieth century on coal miners or women munitions workers? What were the consequences of postwar affluence and the welfare state? This volume will attend to these kinds of questions.

Each of the historical eras spanned by the years 1688 to the present has its own character, its own special mix of economic arrangements, social structure, political style, and cultural expressions. The six parts of the book are meant to mark out for analysis these historical eras—the age of the landed oligarchy, the age of revolutions, the rise of Victorian society, the decline of Victorian Britain, the age of total war, and postwar Britain. A series of closely intertwined themes run throughout the narrative. One is the formation and evolution of the British nation-state and of British national identity, at times in conjunction and at times in conflict with the development of separate national identities in the Celtic countries. A second theme is the emergence, expansion, and decline of the British Empire in the context of a changing global economic order. This theme intertwines closely with the third: Britain's emergence as the world's foremost industrial power and its subsequent economic decline and adaptation. Fourth is the theme of the interplay of international warfare and domestic political change. The final theme weaves together the first four as it focuses on their implications and ramifications for Britons' social identities and gender roles.

If this book succeeds, it will be by helping students understand the peoples of the British Isles in the in the twenty-first century—why they are the way they are. It should also help American students understand themselves and their own society a little better, for the British are enough like the Americans to make comparisons numerous and enough different to make contrasts revealing.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Because Britain is a multinational state that does not now include all of the peoples of the British Isles, it is important to be very careful about using labels like “English” and “British.” But this is an area in which it is difficult to be perfectly consistent and to avoid irritating nationalist sensibilities. Geographically speaking, “Britain” correctly denotes the whole island composed of England, Wales, and Scotland, but not Ireland. However, “Britain”

has also been used by people around the world to refer to the United Kingdom, which came to existence only in 1707 and which included Ireland from 1801 to 1921, but which today includes only Northern Ireland as well as England, Wales, and Scotland. For much of the nineteenth century, Britain meant not only the United Kingdom, but also the British Empire. At the same time, many people both within the British Isles and around the world said “England” when they meant “Britain,” and by force of habit many people still do. Today, Britain technically means the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but it would make no sense to apply that usage to any historical period before 1921.

We have done our best to refer to the English, Welsh, Scots, and Irish as the circumstances require, to be careful when speaking of Britain, and to be accurate in distinguishing the political entity of England from that of Great Britain.

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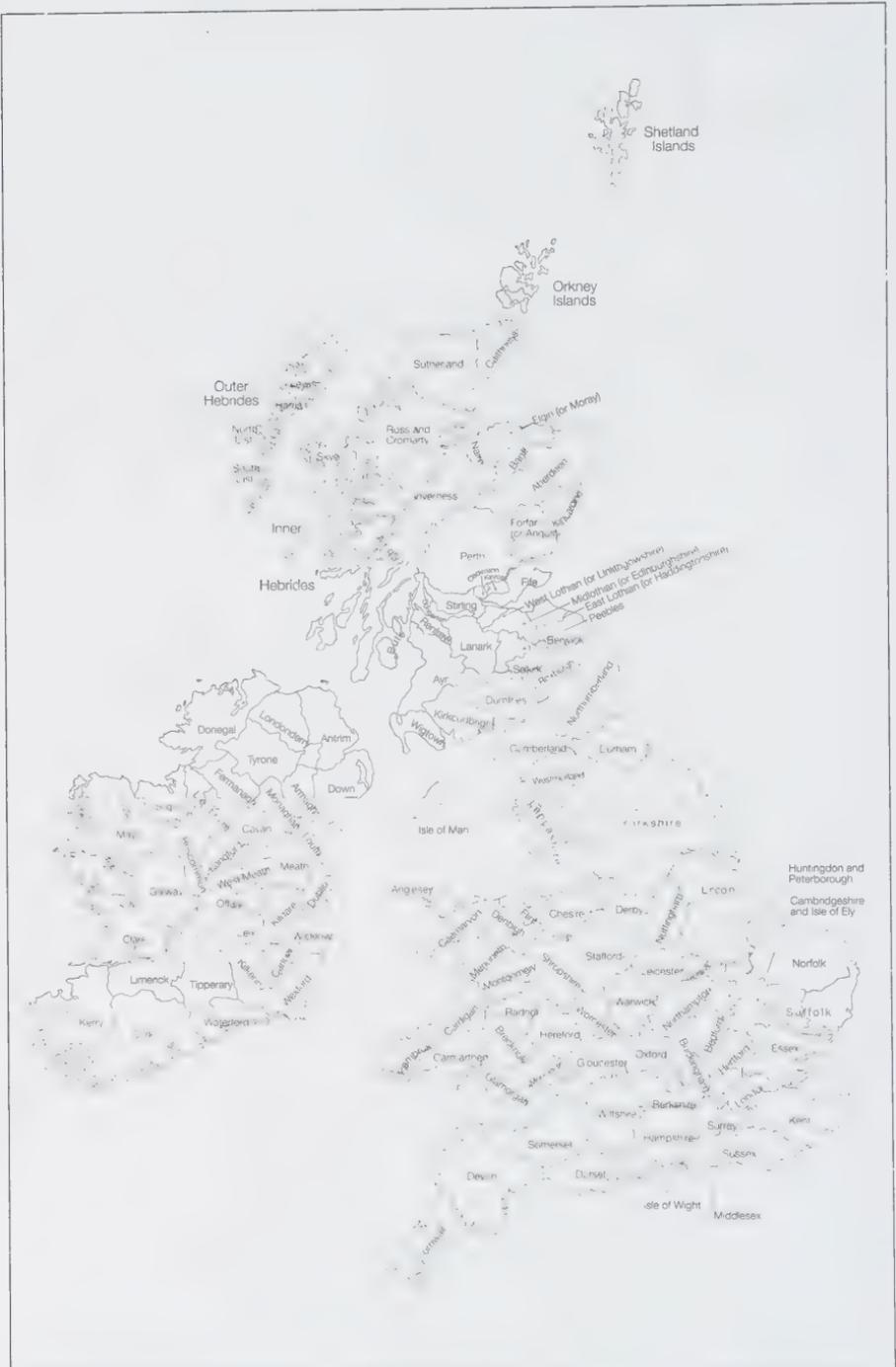
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Part **I**

**The Age of
the Landed
Oligarchy**

1688–1763



Historic counties of Great Britain and Ireland. The counties served as both administrative structures and sources of regional identity. This map remained unchanged until 1972.

Chapter 1

The Lands and Peoples of the British Isles at the End of the Seventeenth Century

In the more than three centuries since 1688, life has changed almost totally for the peoples of the British Isles. Most people at the end of the seventeenth century were engaged in agriculture; at the beginning of the twenty-first, most are involved in industry or allied services. In the seventeenth century, most people lived in rural villages; in the twenty-first, most live in dense metropolitan areas. In the late seventeenth century, society was characterized by face-to-face relationships; today, social relations tend to be more impersonal and bureaucratic. Most women before 1700 lived in subordination to men; relations between men and women are now more equal. Life expectancy in the seventeenth century was perhaps thirty-five years; today it stands at more than seventy. The number of people living in the British Isles has increased more than fivefold. The scope as well as the pace of individual experiences has increased at a dizzying rate. In those three centuries Britain solidified as a nation, grew to great power status, and now has receded to a more normal position as an average European state. In short, since 1688 the British and Irish peoples have experienced as much change as any on earth, and more than most.

One of the most striking ways in which the British Isles of the late seventeenth century differed from that of the 2000s was the degree to which geography and climate dominated people's lives and contributed to sharp regional differences—differences not only in local customs, but also in economy, politics, and culture. The British Isles are not spacious, containing approximately 121,000 square miles (slightly more than half the size of France). They include a remarkable variety of regional topographies, everything from rolling hills to craggy peaks, from watery bogs to storm-beaten

rocky islands. The suddenness of changes in landscape can make Britain seem a large country to the traveler. This fact was accentuated in the late seventeenth century by poor roads and slow means of travel. In 1700, it took more than two days to travel from London to Bath, four and one-half days from London to Manchester, and eleven days from London to Edinburgh. In bad weather, many roads became impassable and travel by sea impossible. Even in good conditions, communications were slow and undependable; hence, there was little central government control.

In 1700, Great Britain as a political entity did not exist. Wales had been administratively absorbed by England in the sixteenth century, but Scotland and Ireland retained much of their ancient independent status. In 1603, an accident of inheritance made James VI of Scotland also James I of England, but this union of crowns did not unite the two countries. Scotland had its own Parliament, legal system (based on Roman law rather than common law), and established church (Presbyterian rather than Anglican). Across the Irish Sea, Ireland, too, resisted English control. True, in 1541 the Irish Parliament designated the English monarch Henry VIII king of Ireland, but it was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century that the English took the final step in eradicating Irish autonomy—only to find that autonomy successfully reasserted 120 years later.

In the late seventeenth century, then, there was no British state, nor was there a single national or religious community. Many people, isolated and illiterate, probably identified with nothing larger than a county, a region, a village, or a clan; insofar as they felt any national allegiance, it was as an Englishman, a Welshman, a Scot, or an Irishman. The English amounted to slightly more than one-half of the 9 to 9.5 million people in the British Isles toward the end of the seventeenth century, and their culture as well as power tended to spread outward into Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Generally speaking, the closer any part of the British Isles was to England, more specifically London, the more strongly it felt English influence.

But the peoples of the British Isles were (and are) a mixture of a variety of ethnic groups, and various regional and local cultures were still much in evidence. Cornish was still spoken in the southwestern corner of England, and Welsh was spoken in Herefordshire. In Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, the Celtic heritage remained prominent. The vast majority of the people in Wales and Ireland spoke no English, nor did many clansmen in the Scottish Highlands. English common law was alien to these Celtic areas, though in Wales it had prevailed officially for a century. The Church of England was the official or *established* church, not only in England, but also in Wales and

Ireland. Yet in Wales, the religious loyalties of many Welsh men and women rested with non-Anglican Protestantism, whereas in Ireland the overwhelming majority of the people were Roman Catholics. In Scotland, the church preferred by a majority of people was Presbyterian, and this *kirk* was much more strongly influenced by Calvinism than by the Church of England. In sum, by neither political tradition, language, cultural heritage, nor religious affiliation was there yet a British nation.

ENGLAND

England is the largest and most geographically blessed of the countries in the British Isles. It encompasses 50,851 square miles, with nearly 2,000 miles of coastline. No point is more than 75 miles from the sea, and rivers and river mouths deeply etch most of England. Naturally, the proximity of the sea has had a great impact on English history and culture. For a long time, the seas provided relatively easy avenues of invasion for peoples from the Continent, and this remained a threat through the eighteenth century. But the sea also made the English enthusiastic sailors, turning their attention to fishing, to overseas trade, and eventually to oceanic empire. Out of their seafaring tradition the English developed the resources in ships and skilled men by which they converted their position as an offshore island of Europe into a great source of security. But in the late seventeenth century, the threat from the sea still seemed as great as the safety it offered.

Rolling hills and valleys characterize most of English topography. The land is highest in the North and West and gradually drops away to green undulating plains in the Midlands, South, and East. The Pennine chain of low mountains, running southward from Northumberland and Yorkshire to the Midland plain, dominate the North of England. Too rough for tillage, this hill country supported mostly hill pasturage and eventually iron and coal mining. The Midland plain is extremely fertile rolling land, long the heart of rural England. To the south and east of the Midland plain, from the English Channel on the south to the eastern part of Yorkshire, extends a wide belt of rich agricultural land, very productive of grain, vegetables, and cattle. In the Southwest lies a high plateau covering much of Devon and Cornwall. This corner of England has a dramatic, picturesque coast with excellent natural harbors; inland it includes desolate, boggy moors—Exmoor, Bodmin Moor, and Dartmoor—on which even today a traveler can scarcely imagine that he or she is still on a densely populated island.



Topography of the British Isles. The 121,000 square miles of the British Isles vary greatly in topography, which helped shape not only distinctive national cultures—English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish—but also unique regional cultures.

Like the topography, England's weather does not run to extremes. The English climate is moderate and well suited for farming. The prevailing wind is from the southwest, which means that the warm waters of the Gulf Stream tend to pull average temperatures upward. Consequently, although England lies as far north as Labrador, its coldest month has a mean temperature of 40°F (and its warmest 62°F). Rainfall is plentiful everywhere in England, though heaviest in the western hills, where it averages thirty-five inches per year. Because of the moderate climate and the fertile soils, agriculture spread through most of England. The once dense forests, characterized by oak, ash, and elm, had largely been cut by the last half of the seventeenth century, especially in the South and East. As early as Queen Elizabeth's reign, the English were concerned about a shortage of timber for fuel and shipbuilding—perhaps the earliest indication that the English population would put great pressure on natural resources.

The English population stood at about five million at the end of the seventeenth century. The Midlands and Southeast were relatively densely populated compared to the Uplands of the North and Northwest and the moors of the Southwest. Throughout England the population was distributed in *nucleated villages* (clusters of houses, surrounded by cultivated fields or pasture lands) in the valleys and river bottoms. About three-fifths of all English men and women lived in villages of three hundred to four hundred people, and given the poor roads and lack of economic impetus, few moved far. There were about eight hundred country market towns, but together they housed less than 15 percent of the population. Apart from London, only Bristol and Norwich had more than twenty thousand people.

London was the great exception to the rule of rural life in the seventeenth century. Its population was 550,000 in 1700, about 11 percent of the population of England, and it was growing rapidly, having doubled in size since 1600. The largest European city west of Constantinople, London was the center of national politics, the location of the high courts, the greatest port in England by far, the radiating nucleus of foreign trade, and the home of a growing financial interest. Into London poured thousands of unemployed from the provinces; as a result, the city teemed with street people of all sorts—vagrants, venders, cutpurses, confidence men, prostitutes, gamblers, and beggars. Although the focal point of fashion, London was also regarded as an unhealthy influence on the nation, partly because it drained away wealth and population and partly because it housed the makings of a mob that might intimidate the government.



London in the late seventeenth century: a view from the River Thames at London Bridge. This engraving, completed in 1675, shows London as rebuilt after the Great Fire of 1666. Note the magnificent dome of the new St. Paul's Cathedral, designed by Sir Christopher Wren.

Important as it was, London was not England. The great majority of English men and women of the late seventeenth century spent their lives in the villages and fields of the countryside. To be sure, the elite of the social order—the families of the two hundred temporal and spiritual lords, plus those of the richest of the non-noble landowners—liked to spend several months a year enjoying the London *season*. Yet even these wealthiest of families lived for most of the year in their great country houses. Maintenance of social order, which was crucial to people who had lived through the turmoil of civil war in the 1640s and 1650s, required that the elite display their superiority in person, exact deference from their inferiors, and carry out local administration and justice. Moreover, many of the local squires were too poor and socially inept to venture into London.

The aristocracy (titled nobility) and gentry (large landowners)—a total of approximately fifteen thousand families—stood at the top of the social hierarchy, which ranged downward through yeomen, tenant farmers, village tradesmen and craftsmen, farm laborers, cottagers, and paupers. Backwoods squires—coarse-mannered, rough-and-ready in dispensing justice, patriotic, independent, and suspicious of London monied interests—regarded themselves as the heart of the nation. After the restoration of the Stuart line in 1660, the gentry reigned like little kings in the countryside. There were no police and no standing army, and the gentry controlled the militia. As

justices of the peace (JPs), the gentry took responsibility for law and order at the local level; as justices of the Quarter Sessions, teams of JPs ruled the counties. They were not paid for this work. As Sir William Petty said, “The honour of being trusted and the pleasure of being feared hath been thought a competent reward.”

The populace over whom the aristocracy and gentry ruled was divided into a number of social orders. Some (perhaps 30 percent of the population) were small farmers, both owners and tenants, and their families; others (another 10 to 12 percent) were professionals, merchants, tradesmen, shopkeepers, and craftsmen (and craftswomen) and their families. Most of the rest—the *laboring poor*—led precarious lives of relentless work. The majority were farm laborers (men, women, and children) who worked the land for the farmers and landowners. The landowners took care to win for themselves absolute rights of private property during the seventeenth century, but they gave no such rights to tenants and laborers, who remained completely dependent on them. The only restraints recognized by the big landlords were the documented rights of small owners, the goodwill arising from immemorial custom, and the stubborn insistence by the poor on their traditional rights. The customs of *paternalism*, by which those in the top ranks of society accepted responsibility to care for those in the bottom ranks (in exchange for the lower orders’ deference and obedience), constituted the best hope for the poor.

Compared to the rest of the British Isles, England in the late 1600s was a prosperous nation, but standards of living varied wildly. The wealthiest aristocrats and gentry enjoyed upward of several thousand pounds sterling (£) a year, but most laborers earned £20 a year or less. Agricultural techniques had been very slowly improving, however, and by the late seventeenth century the English people were beginning to leave behind the subsistence crises that from time immemorial had periodically afflicted the population. Nevertheless, bad weather could still cause a poor harvest, high bread prices, and widespread hunger. In addition, wages were kept low because the privileged thought that the pinch of poverty alone made the common people work. The bulk of the population lived at the margin of real hardship.

Agriculture was the main source of wealth as well as the principal occupation. The medieval system of agriculture had long been in decline in England. Under that system, lords of manors had held their land from their feudal superiors in return for military service and had farmed the land with

both free and unfree labor. In early modern England, however, estate owners leased parcels of land to tenant farmers, all of whom were legally free. The tenants and their wives worked the land with the assistance of hired farm laborers, both male and female. Moreover, early modern English agriculture was commercially oriented. Most crops were produced for the market rather than for subsistence, although very little English farming was yet specialized, except in a few areas such as the environs of London, where market gardening for the ever expanding London population prospered.

England already had a bustling manufacturing sector, much of it centered on wool. England had long been known for wool production, but in the seventeenth century, the government prohibited the exportation of unfinished woolen fabric in order to encourage the various English industries involved in producing finished wools. Between 1660 and 1700 the value of finished woolen cloth exported probably doubled. Woolens were produced everywhere, but principally in the West Country between Exeter and Bristol, in East Anglia, and in Yorkshire. Most woolen products were manufactured through the *domestic* or *putting-out* system—that is, the wool was put out by a merchant to craftsmen in their cottages and carried through the various stages of hand production: carding, spinning, weaving, fulling, and dyeing. Most of the laborers were farmers and their families who supplemented their agricultural income by producing the woolens. Hence, even this key industry remained highly seasonal and deeply attached to country life.

Woolens were not the only source of England's industrial strength. In fact, although wool production increased in the last decades of the century, its share of industrial exports fell. Assisted by the aggressive English foreign and colonial policy, and by the immigration into England of skilled French Huguenot craftsmen, a number of industries rose in the last part of the century, including paper, glass, cheap housewares, and textiles such as silk and linen. Brewing and soap making became major enterprises, as did tin, copper, lead, and coal mining. The organization of industry remained largely unchanged, with most production still carried out in households by nuclear families and apprentices and laborers. Even so, England was moving beyond the usual European level in manufacturing and far beyond most of the rest of the British Isles.

The commercial expansion of England was even more impressive. As Professor Charles Wilson wrote, "England was becoming a world entrepôt [trading center], serving not only Europe, but the extra-European world,

and was herself served by a growing fleet of merchant shipping, a growing equipment of docks, shipyards, wharves and warehouses, a growing community of merchants and tradesmen." Again assisted by the government's aggressive trade policy, and building on the fact that England was the largest free-trade area in Europe, England's foreign trade expanded in both volume and variety. Exports went up by about 50 percent between 1660 and 1700 and imports by more than 30 percent. Most important in this remarkable expansion of trade were reexports: English merchants imported raw materials and food (such as sugar, cotton, and tobacco), as well as slaves from colonial areas, and reexported them all over the world. Every transaction brought profits to Englishmen and encouraged the development of comparatively sophisticated financial institutions. Merchants, shipowners, and shipbuilders needed to borrow, and their needs brought into existence a new set of middlemen between lenders and borrowers, principally in London. Scriveners and goldsmiths, with whom lenders could deposit their money, as well as lending merchants, thus began to act in some ways like bankers, or *protobankers*. By the 1670s, a highly unpopular but very important group of men in the city of London was carrying out the essentials of banking: taking deposits, discounting bills of credit, and issuing notes. This commercial revolution was producing a *monied interest*, a sign of the unique (except for the Netherlands) commercialization of the English economy.

The merchants and financiers of England were often *Dissenters*, non-Anglican Protestants who played an important role in the shifting the religious composition of the country. Religion was crucial to the English people in the seventeenth century; it was capable of arousing strong emotions and radical political action. Most people still believed that questions of church polity and doctrine were matters of eternal life and death. Moreover, most members of the landed elite (the aristocracy and gentry) thought that, without an established, unified religion, the nation would splinter and the social order would crumble. "Religion it is that keeps the subject in obedience," said English statesman Sir John Eliot.

The experience of the Civil War years only confirmed this truth in the minds of the landowners. The triumph of the Puritan forces under Oliver Cromwell and the execution of King Charles I in 1649 had ushered in a time of political and religious experiment. The great iceberg of English society had turned over for a decade. With the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, the iceberg had been righted and the common people resubmerged. Landowners wanted to make sure the great overturning could never happen again.

They believed that an established Church of England on the *episcopal model* (that is, with bishops ruling dioceses) was a main instrument of social as well as religious order.

The English had long adhered to the tradition that church and state are two parts of one organism. Thus, even though many varieties of Christianity grew up after the Reformation, most believed in a uniform established church, to which all the English people should belong. By the 1660s the form of that church had been in dispute for more than a century. Queen Elizabeth's settlement of the church issue had taken the form of a compromise between the Anglo-Catholicism of her father, Henry VIII, and the more extreme Protestantism advocated by Continental reformers. Thus, in Elizabeth's time, the Church of England recognized the monarch as its supreme governor; maintained not only the traditional episcopal structure, but also much of the old Roman Catholic liturgy; and adhered to a modified sacramental doctrine: the Church was regarded as the true institution established by Jesus Christ to be the necessary intermediary between God and the individual.

Such views had come under attack by the Puritans of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A force for reform within the Church of England, Puritanism emphasized individual judgment based on reading the Christian scriptures firsthand and so downplayed the role of the Church as a divinely established intermediary. Puritans not only preferred a simple liturgy and greater strictness in the conduct of life, but they also rejected the hierarchical principles embodied in the episcopal structure of the Church. Puritan beliefs shaped both English Presbyterianism and the Independent (Congregationalist) movement of the seventeenth century: Presbyterians demanded that councils (or *presbyteries*) of ministers and lay elders take the place of bishops, whereas Independents sought to place ultimate church power in the individual congregations. During the Civil War, Puritanism was, for a time, triumphant: Parliament abolished the episcopacy and installed a Presbyterian church structure. In 1660, however, the Church of England in its episcopal form was restored as firmly as the Stuart monarchy. For most of the ruling elite, Puritanism meant social upheaval, religious turmoil, and radical politics.

One thing the various brands of Protestants agreed on was their opposition—perhaps *fear* and *loathing* are more accurate words—to Roman Catholics. Although the Anglican church was not far removed from Catholicism in doctrine or church structure, it had long been strongly anti-Catholic. The Puritans were even more militantly anti-Catholic, and for

many years they had demanded strict enforcement of the laws against the remaining English Catholics (known as *recusants*), of whom there were very few, mainly some landed families in the North and Northwest.

When Charles II was invited in 1660 to return to England, he promised “liberty to tender consciences,” but Parliament was in no mood to encourage religious pluralism. Both Roman Catholics and Puritans faced legal penalties. The Act of Uniformity of 1662 required all clergymen to use the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* and to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles, the defining creed of Anglicanism. The Act also reestablished the authority of the bishops and removed from their *livings* (clerical positions) all clergymen who would not submit. About two thousand clergymen (of nine thousand total) were thus ejected from the Church of England; they constituted the formal foundation of English *Nonconformity* (or Dissent): non-Anglican Protestantism. At the same time, a series of parliamentary acts (collectively known as the Clarendon Code) suppressed any unauthorized religious meetings, required municipal officials to take communion in the Anglican church, and limited the civil rights of Nonconformist clergy. The Clarendon Code was not strictly enforced, but it did succeed in dividing Protestantism in England.

Puritans offered surprisingly little resistance to the reimposition of Anglicanism in the 1660s. Perhaps they had been demoralized and discredited by their association with sedition, or perhaps Puritanism’s emotional power was being eroded by the growing atmosphere of rationalism and scientific revolution. In any case, Puritanism survived in many English families, both within the Church of England and without, and stood ready to catch fire again in the evangelical movement of the eighteenth century as well as to express its unbending anti-Catholicism at the slightest whiff of *popery* in England.

WALES

Unlike England, Wales is almost entirely mountainous. Nearly all of its area (7,467 square miles, about one-sixth the size of England) is covered by a series of mountains extending roughly from north to south and dominating the whole of the interior. The mountains are highest in the north and south, the central section being a high, broken plateau. Even the narrow coastal plains to the south and west are hilly. The mountainous interior is deeply cut by a number of rivers that fan down and out from the central ridges toward the Lowland areas. The rivers that rush down steep slopes into

broader valleys are especially numerous in South Wales, where great deposits of iron and coal were eventually found.

The Welsh people settled in the valleys of their rugged country. The difficulty of the terrain kept the population sparse: there were not more than four hundred thousand Welsh people at the end of the seventeenth century. The deep valleys with their steep slopes had long made invasion difficult and enabled the Welsh to preserve much of their ancient Celtic culture. The isolation of individual settlements and the vestiges of Celtic tribalism exaggerated the importance of certain great families, whose aggressive assertion of family rights and pride earned for Wales in the minds of Englishmen a reputation for turbulence. An English member of Parliament in the seventeenth century declared that the Welsh are “an idolatrous nation and worshippers of divells . . . thrust out into the mountains where they lived long like thieves and robbers and are to this day the most base, peasantly, perfidious peoples of the world.”

Of course, the English themselves had much to do with turbulence in Wales. Land-hungry Norman barons based in England had conquered Wales, often by a process of allying themselves with locally powerful Welsh families. Two subsequent major wars of independence by the Welsh—most notably that of Owen Glendower in the early fifteenth century—encouraged a strong sense of Welsh separateness from Anglo-Norman England. But Welsh attachment to England was strengthened and order spread in the countryside by the fact that Henry Tudor (Henry VII of England) was partly of Welsh blood. By the famous Acts of Union of 1536 and 1542, Henry VIII’s eminent civil servant Thomas Cromwell redefined the Welsh border, extended the English system of shires and common law to Wales, and incorporated Welsh representatives into the English Parliament at Westminster.

The Acts of Union did not integrate the Welsh and English cultures, but they did begin the long process of separating the Welsh ruling order from the mass of the people. In Wales, the aristocracy did not amount to much, and the country was in the hands of the gentry families, most of them Welsh in origin. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many of the men in these gentry families were attracted by the economic and political opportunities in London; many became pensioners of the English Crown; some married English heiresses. As a result, the Welsh gentry became steadily more anglicized in language, tastes, and style of life. By the latter 1600s, many gentry were losing their ability to speak Welsh, which, however, remained the language of the overwhelming majority of the common people.

Under these conditions, both geographic and cultural, Welsh agriculture in the seventeenth century was comparatively backward. On the whole, the soil was poor, and the topography encouraged isolated farms rather than village settlements. Many estates were in the hands of either anglicized Welsh gentry living in England or absentee English landlords. Roads were extremely bad, maintained if at all by forced labor commanded by the local vestry (parish ruling council). Local loyalties remained very strong, as each community was virtually self-supporting. Modern farming techniques spread very slowly; even the scythe was uncommon outside the richest wheat-growing valleys. Arable land was scattered in the valleys and river bottoms throughout the Highland interior, but it was always combined with pasturage. Even in the more easily farmed vales of the South and East, only about one-third of the land was arable, the rest being meadows for hay. Hence, Welsh agriculture was predominantly pastoral, with sheep and cattle being the most important products. By the late seventeenth century, Welsh drovers herded cattle along eight or nine main roads eastward into the Midlands and South of England.

The conditions of agriculture kept standards of living in Wales very low for the great bulk of the population, lower than those of all but the poorest English men and women. With incomes almost totally dependent on farming, the laboring poor teetered on the edge of starvation, eating at the best of times milk and bread but almost no meat. They lived in squalid huts with mud floors and rush-thatched roofs, heated by peat fires. Most were illiterate. Their lives revolved around the seasons and offered little leisure except at Christmas season and on saints' days. Communal activities such as harvesting and threshing provided occasions for singing and dancing, nearly the only bright spots in otherwise drab lives. Wandering bards (poets and harpers) still spun fantasies of the heroic past, but bardic culture was in decline.

As is usual in such premodern societies, religion was the main consolation of life. The Welsh accepted the Reformation of Henry VIII without much trouble. As in England, Welsh monasteries were dissolved, churches plundered, and clerical land sold. The gentry benefited; the poor were indifferent. What mattered most to the Welsh was that Queen Elizabeth appointed Welshmen to vacant Welsh bishoprics and had the Bible and Prayer Book translated into Welsh. These steps were important, both because they helped preserve Welsh as a living language and because they kept Wales attached to Protestantism. No religious divide appeared between Wales and England such as would poison Anglo-Irish relations.

Within Wales, however, an important religious (as well as linguistic and social) divide developed. During the Civil War, Wales remained largely Anglican and Royalist, but the reign of Parliament saw Puritanism make headway in Welsh parishes. The Restoration of 1660 sought to sweep away Welsh Puritanism, but it failed. The restored Church of England in Wales stood unreformed. Welsh bishops regarded their appointments as stepping-stones to the richer dioceses of England and furthermore had to spend a good part of each year attending the House of Lords in London. The resulting lack of oversight, in conjunction with a shortage of trained clergymen and the overly large size of Welsh dioceses and parishes, allowed Nonconformity to thrive. Rising mainly from the lesser gentry—substantial *freeholders* (farmers who owned rather than leased their land), tenants, and townsmen—



Horeb Chapel. Cum Teigl, Llan Ffestiniog. Numerous chapels such as this one in North Wales dot the Welsh countryside and testify to the importance of Nonconformity in shaping Welsh identity and culture.

Welsh Nonconformists were strongly attached to the Welsh language and opposed to Anglicanism, the religion of the anglicized gentry and magistrates. Eventually, this division would produce a severe tension in Welsh society.

SCOTLAND

Nowhere in the British Isles has geography had a more striking effect than in Scotland. The nearly thirty-two thousand square miles of Scotland (about three-fifths the size of England) break into three distinct physical regions: (1) the Highlands; (2) the central plain; and (3) the Southern Uplands, just north of the English border. By long tradition, the latter two regions are referred to as the Lowlands. Here is found the most fertile land, especially in a broad crescent extending from the central plain around to the eastern and northern coastal areas. But even the fertile crescent is fairly hilly, with much moorland and boggy fields. In the seventeenth century, no natural or man-made borders broke the vista into compact patches. The Lowlands were relatively treeless, a succession of windy moors, fields, and pastures.

The Highlands—about two-thirds of the total land area of Scotland—are much less hospitable than the Lowlands, though Highland scenery is often dramatic and beautiful. The Highlands are defined by the famous Highland Line, a geological fault that runs from southwest to northeast, from the Firth of Clyde to Stonehaven. Behind the Highland Line—that is, to its north and west—the mountains of the Highlands spring up abruptly in a succession of parallel ridges to the west coast. Off the coast are more than 750 rugged, stony islands; in the far northeast rise the islands of Orkney and Shetland. The Highlands and islands have a rugged terrain. Ben Nevis, at 4,500 feet the highest mountain in the British Isles, is in the Scottish Highlands. Deep valleys, called straths and glens, cut through the mountain ridges; travel between the valleys is often difficult. The mountains affect all of Scottish weather because they receive heavy rainfall (sixty inches a year in the west) while protecting eastern Scotland, which is comparatively dry. The Highlands therefore are considerably wetter and colder than the Lowlands—a tough terrain for a tough people.

The isolated straths and glens of the Highlands served as a haven for ancient cultures: Scandinavian in Orkney, Shetland, and Caithness (the northernmost county) and Celtic in the mainland. Celtic peoples once dominated all of Scotland, but were pushed into the Highlands by Anglo-Saxon

invasions from the Southeast. In the seventeenth century, Norn, a variety of old Norse, was still spoken in the northern isles, and Scots, a derivative of Anglo-Saxon, in the Midland valleys. Most Highlanders spoke only Gaelic. English was the language of the Southern Uplands, gradually spreading north and west.

The population of Scotland in the late seventeenth century stood at about one million, and was distributed very differently from today. About half lived in the Highlands and half in the Lowlands, with most of the latter in the central plain. Scotland generally was much more sparsely settled than England. There were about 275 towns (*burghs*), but most were tiny, with 100 people or fewer. Only Edinburgh (with thirty thousand inhabitants) and Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Dundee (with about ten thousand each) were burghs of significant size. More than 80 percent of all Scots lived in the countryside, usually in hamlets (or *farmtouns*), consisting of a farm large enough to support a plow team. The arable land was too dispersed to support English-style nucleated villages. In the Highlands and Lowlands alike, people clustered on the slopes of strath and glen near the scattered arable land. Most of these country people were peasants, either tenant farmers, subtenants called *crofters* and *cottars*, or farm laborers and servants. The upper social orders alone owned land—the nobility, the substantial non-noble landowners (the *lairds*), and the petty landlords (the *bonnet lairds*).

Law and custom alike retained much more of the feudal system in Scotland than in England. The most unusual feature of Scottish society in the seventeenth century was the Highland clans. The clans originated in the Middle Ages when feudal social and economic relations were grafted onto the old Celtic tribal system. Kinship—real or mythical—was the key to the clans. Every member of a clan, from chieftain to shepherd, was thought to be related by common ancestry to the clan chief; hence, a bond of kin loyalty underlay the connection between landlord and tenant. Traditionally, clan bards celebrated the heroism of the tribal ancestors and kept the folkloric genealogy of the clan. Because the primary function of the clan was military, the clan chief had the right to call to battle all the men of his clan. In fact, most clansmen held land by a form of tenure called *ward-holding* that obliged the tenant to military service as well as rent.

The clans were quite warlike. Succession to clan leadership was by *primogeniture* (the right of the firstborn son), but the new chief was supposed to prove his bravery and honor by leading raids on other clans or on the long-suffering Lowlanders. Further, a crime against a clansman was to be punished not by the national government, but by retaliation on the part of

the victim's clan. Therefore, the Highlands were the scene of almost constant feuding—raiding and counterraidering as the debts of blood feuds were collected. The fighting often centered around the theft of cattle because the wealth of a clansman was measured in cattle, the main product of Highland agriculture. The feuding often escalated to near civil war as a result of shifting alliances among the clans, and especially because of a long struggle between the Campbells and the Macdonalds for leadership of Highland culture.

This state of society in the Highlands and its contrast with Lowland society must be understood if Scottish politics in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is to be unraveled. Much of the bloodshed that characterized those years was a matter of one clan taking revenge on another. In particular, the expansion of the power of the Campbells in the Southwest was crucial because it set the Campbells at loggerheads with the MacLeans and the Macdonalds. Moreover, the Lowlanders and the Scottish government for many decades sought to end what they saw as lawlessness in the Highlands, as well as frequent eruptions of Highlanders into the Lowlands. The sight of a Highland clan on a raid, dressed in their belted plaids and armed with broadswords, shields, and dirks, was enough to turn any peaceful man's bowels to water—and to call forth repressive edicts known as *Letters of Fire and Sword* from the government. By the late seventeenth century, the clans were under severe pressure and believed that their way of life was at stake.

The standard of living in the Highlands was noticeably lower than in the Lowlands, but it was precarious everywhere. Scottish agriculture was devoted to raising barley, oats, and cattle. Most Scots ate little other than oatmeal, plus some milk, cheese, and butter. They ate oatmeal mixed with milk as porridge, mixed with water as gruel, or baked as oatbread and bannocks. If the oat crop failed—as it did in the mid-1670s and later 1690s—peasants starved. They usually wore coarse linen shirts and the blanket-like plaids (the kilt was not worn until the eighteenth century), both woven by the family at home. The nobility lived in substantial homes, more like castles than country manors, but the peasantry lived in miserable huts. The usual peasant cottage had stone and turf walls, a turf-thatched roof, a mud floor, no glass in the windows, and no chimney. Most were heated by peat fires. Farm animals lived in the cottage with the family, though usually confined by a partition to one end of the single room. The most valuable parts of the cottage in that treeless country were the roof beams, which a family took with them, if allowed, when forced to move.

The Scottish economy suffered from both the harsh natural environment and the political instability of the country. In the central plain, grain growing was fairly successful, though the techniques were almost wholly traditional. The Highland clans grew as much grain as the land allowed, but almost always needed to import it from the Lowlands. They paid for their grain imports with exports of cattle. Scottish trade was recovering from the terrible years of war, disease, and confiscation of the 1640s and 1650s, but it could not match the volume or sophistication of the English mercantile sector. The Scots traded agricultural products (hides, skins, fish, and wool) to northern Europe and France in return for timber, iron, and manufactured articles. The most important development in Scottish trade was an increase in the regular export of black cattle (the ancestor of the Angus breed) to England. The London market reached all the way to the Highlands and made cattle droving southward a major enterprise. Close to twenty thousand head of cattle a year passed through Carlisle in the 1660s. Eventually, this trade would be a crucial link between England and Scotland, sufficient even to overcome centuries of hostility.

The Highland-Lowland division of Scotland had as great an effect on religion as on social structure and standards of living. Broadly speaking, the Highlands in the seventeenth century were too remote for the people to be deeply attached to any branch of religion, whereas the Lowlands were profoundly committed to Protestant Christianity. In the Highlands, a few clans—most notably the Macdonalds—remained Roman Catholic, whereas most of the others were loosely Episcopalian (that is, they believed in a Protestant church ruled by bishops). In the Lowlands, however, Calvinist Presbyterianism prevailed.

The intensity of Lowland Presbyterianism is worthy of note. The Reformation in Scotland had not been led by the Crown as in England, but rather by a broad alliance drawn from the nobility, gentry, and burghers (town dwellers). These reformers believed that the Roman Catholic Church had long neglected the spiritual welfare of the Scottish people. To revitalize Scottish Christianity and to battle clerical corruption, they adopted a *presbyterian* system of church government that allowed the laity to share power: elected kirk sessions (church councils) at the parish level and presbyteries (representative bodies) instead of bishops at the diocesan level. An attempt by Charles I (king of both England and Scotland from 1625 to 1649) to force the Scottish church to adopt the Anglican prayer book and to crush Presbyterianism radicalized the Scottish reformers and led to armed rebellion against the king. It also put the Scottish church in the hands of the

Covenanters—militant Puritans who brooked no compromise with bishops and who espoused a stern moral code.

The Covenanters took their name from a Scottish Reformation tradition that drew on the ancient Hebrew ideal of a covenant between God and his chosen people. In 1557, reformers signed the first formal Covenant, by which they promised to resist the “Congregation of Satan” (the Roman Catholic Church), but it was the National Covenant of 1638 that became the foundational document of the Covenanters. Declaring themselves bound to act “as beseemeth Christians who have renewed their Covenant with God,” the men who signed this document asserted their opposition to Charles I’s political and religious aims and their commitment to Presbyterian doctrine and polity.

The Covenanting tradition remained a vital part of Scottish life in the Lowlands. There, the reformers largely succeeded in establishing schools as well as kirk sessions in every locality. Presbyterianism penetrated deep into the social structure, and literacy spread much more widely than in any other part of the British Isles. Hence, when Charles II was restored to the Scottish as well as the English throne in 1660, his determination to bring the episcopacy back to Scotland was decidedly unpopular in the Lowlands. Approximately three hundred Scottish clergymen refused to accept the bishops and were ejected from the Church of Scotland. Many of these were extreme Covenanters, as were many of the common people. The government tried in the 1660s and 1670s to quell the Covenanters by force. Violence flared, notably in a Covenanter rising in the Southwest of Scotland in 1679, which the government put down with the assistance of Highland troops. At the Battle of Bothwell Brig, the Highlanders seized the occasion to pay back with savage ferocity the grudge they bore from earlier Covenanter persecution. Radical Covenanting factions continued to erupt in sporadic rebellions throughout the early 1680s, and the Covenanter tradition remained a potent force in Presbyterianism and an important dimension in the clash of cultures between Lowlanders and Highlanders.

IRELAND

Everywhere in the British Isles of the seventeenth century, land and religion were vital to the lives of the people, but nowhere were they of such significance, nor was their intertwining so explosive and tragic, as in Ireland. The peculiar way that issues of land ownership and religious affiliation

became tightly bonded would make for extraordinary political violence and economic backwardness in Ireland, as well as for strained constitutional relations with England for more than two hundred years.

It seems doubly tragic that Ireland should suffer so because the Emerald Isle by nature should be a bountiful country. Ireland is the westernmost of the British Isles, situated about thirteen miles from Lowland Scotland and seventy miles from England. It consists of thirty-two thousand square miles; hence, it is slightly larger than Scotland and about three-fifths the size of England. Unlike Scotland and Wales, Ireland has no central spine of mountains. The central region of Ireland is a broad, gently rolling plain, surrounded by low mountains. These mountains are clustered, and routes between them offer easy access to the central plain. No part of Ireland is wholly cut off from the rest, although the mountainous areas of the North and West are remote as well as barren. Further, the northeastern province, Ulster, is fairly clearly defined by a chain of mountains and lakes. The Celtic culture held on longest in the North and West. Indeed, Ulster was the last of the four provinces (the others being Leinster, Munster, and Connacht) to fall to English conquest.

For the most part, the soil of Ireland is good and the climate equable. As the westernmost European offshore island, Ireland is the most subject to the influence of the Atlantic. The weather is consistently cool and damp and does not go to extremes in any direction. Ireland is neither as warm and dry as southeastern England nor as cold and wet as Wales and the Scottish Highlands. A typical day is cloudy and rainy: rain falls 250 days a year in the West and 180 days in the East. A fairly warm drizzle causes the Irish to say, "It's a fine soft day, thanks be to God." The island is green all year long, with lush pastures, meadows, and fields, but the wet climate makes for numerous bogs, heaths, lakes, and streams. Peat bogs even today cover one-seventh of Ireland.

The population of Ireland in the 1680s was about two million. It had increased significantly since mid-century, for the population was recovering from the destructive wars of English conquest in the late sixteenth century and the civil wars of the 1640s and early 1650s. The population was almost entirely rural. As in Scotland and Wales, Celtic culture had never held towns to be of great importance, and even in the late seventeenth century, there were few Irish towns of any size. Dublin, the capital and center of trade, had a population of sixty thousand in 1675. Only a few other port and trading towns had more than five thousand inhabitants—most notably, Cork, Limerick, Waterford, and Galway.

By the 1700s, the Irish population was deeply divided over religion. About 75 or 80 percent of the people in Ireland were Roman Catholic; the rest were Anglican or Presbyterian. In Leinster, Munster, and Connacht, the Protestants were a thin veneer laid over a vast block of rough Catholic wood—95 percent of the population was Catholic in these three provinces. Not so in Ulster, where Protestants amounted to about half of the population, with most concentrated in the northeast. Everywhere, most Catholics were native Irish (a category which by this time included the descendants of the Norman knights who had invaded and seized much of Ireland in the twelfth century), whereas most Protestants were of English or Scottish descent. To aggravate matters, most landowners by the late seventeenth century were Protestants, and most tenants and farm laborers were Catholics.

This startling and dangerous socio-religious alignment developed during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as a result of both the Protestant Reformation and the English monarchy's efforts to centralize and expand its control over Ireland. When Henry VIII began his reign in 1509, the English Crown effectively controlled only a small portion of Ireland, *the Pale* around the city of Dublin. Henry's efforts to solidify and extend English governmental control beyond the Pale aroused fierce opposition from Irish landowners. The Reformation strengthened the forces of Irish resistance. Unlike in England, Wales, and Scotland, the Reformation did not *take* in Ireland. The Irish did not object to Henry VIII's substituting himself for the pope as head of the Church of England, but they rebelled when his more enthusiastic Protestant successors tried to impose significant doctrinal reforms on Ireland.

English *plantation policy* further aggravated Anglo-Irish relations. In 1556, Henry VIII's Roman Catholic daughter, Queen Mary I, sought to extend English control over Ireland by confiscating the land of Irish rebels and redistributing it to English colonists, thus *planting* loyal Englishmen in Ireland. After Mary's Protestant sister, Elizabeth I, took the throne, this policy took on religious dimensions, with the planting of Protestant English landowners in Munster. It was, however, Elizabeth's Stuart successor, James I of England and VI of Scotland, who implemented the plantation policy most broadly. In 1610, the last two Irish chieftains able to mount large-scale resistance to English conquest fled Ireland for France. This infamous Flight of the Earls provided the opportunity for James to effect the plantation of Ulster on a large scale. Between 1610 and 1625, Ulster was planted by Scottish and English adventurers who were willing to undertake colonization. Their plantations were more successful than earlier attempts because they



The Provinces of Ireland. Connacht and the westernmost reaches of Munster contained the poorest of Ireland's population, whereas Ulster was home to the largest percentage of Protestants. Leinster included the capital of Dublin, the center of British political power in Ireland.

brought colonists at all levels of society—tradesmen, artisans, and tenants as well as landowners. Most of these colonists were in fact Scottish Presbyterians, who from that day to this have given Ulster much of its uniquely hard-working but rather dour character.

Additional transfers of land were yet to come in the seventeenth century. In 1641, the Catholic aristocracy and gentry—of both Celtic (or Gaelic) and Norman descent—still owned about 58 percent of all Irish land. But the Civil War, which was more confused and bloody in Ireland than anywhere else in the British Isles, resulted in the confiscation of more Catholic land. In 1641, Irish Catholics precipitated a furious rebellion in Ulster with an outburst of pent-up frustration against Protestant colonists. As many as four thousand Protestants were killed, but initial reports in England put the number of deaths at two hundred thousand. This alleged massacre eventually brought down on Ireland the wrath of Oliver Cromwell and his New Model Army, which crushed the Catholic rebels and opened the way for a massive transfer of land ownership. In order to repay English entrepreneurs who had financed the expedition, to reward the soldiers of his army, and to plant in Ireland Protestant veterans who might bring order to the countryside, Cromwell expropriated large numbers of Catholic landowners—essentially, all who could not prove their “constant good affection to the commonwealth of England,” during the Civil War. Thousands were forced into the rocky and barren land west of the River Shannon in Connacht; others were packed off into servitude in the West Indies. The percentage of Irish land owned by Catholics fell to just 8 percent.

The expropriated Irish Catholic landlords never accepted their fate. Those who could pursued every legal and political means to recover their estates. Some became tenants and laborers—understandably sullen and uncooperative—of the Anglo-Protestants. Others became bandits who roamed the countryside, half rebels and half thieves—men called *Tories*, who assuaged their family pride by stealing from the colonists. All of the dispossessed hoped that a restoration of the Stuarts to the throne would bring return of their lands.

When Charles II was restored in 1660, the moment of vindication for the expropriated Catholics seemed at hand. But their dreams were not to be realized. Charles II did not entirely reverse the Cromwellian settlement of Ireland. He did arrange a compromise that returned one-third of the Cromwellian estates to Irish landlords, Catholic or not, who had not been guilty of rebellion against the Crown. Nevertheless, nearly 80 percent of the land remained in the hands of English and Scottish Protestants, with



Monea Castle in County Fermanagh, Ireland. This fortified house, built in the early seventeenth century, attests to Irish concerns about security.

most of the Gaelic-speaking Irish Catholics reduced to tenants and farm laborers.

Under these circumstances, it is remarkable how well the Irish economy performed in the late seventeenth century. The wars had been devastating, the transfer of land ownership disruptive, and the social and religious divisions debilitating. Yet the Irish economy made a significant if gradual recovery in the second half of the century. Ulster in particular prospered, for the plantation policy established new towns, revived old ones, and invigorated farming. The new landlords everywhere in Ireland felt unrestricted by custom, and by hard work and a commercial outlook they increased the output of the hard-pressed agricultural sector. The domestic production of woolens and linen, iron smelting, and the cutting of barrel staves were the most important industries. The latter two, however, tended to disappear locally when the deposits of iron ore and the stands of trees were exhausted. Cattle constituted the main export, and Irish cattle exporters did so well after the 1650s that English cattle breeders brought pressure on Parliament at Westminster to stop the importation of Irish cattle into England.

By the 1680s, Ireland was probably marginally more productive than Scotland. Nevertheless, Ireland remained a backward country, even by pre-modern standards. The landlords could live in comfort, but as their castle-like fortified houses showed, they were never free from the fear of raids by Tories or of a general uprising by the Catholic populace, whose Gaelic tongue they could not understand. Living in isolation, the landlords developed a fortress mentality. Many of them were upstarts—ex-soldiers and men on the make. Hence, the squires and squireens of back-country Ireland were known in England as an exceptionally rough lot—hard-drinking, hard-riding, heavy-gambling swaggerers.

The bulk of the population lived on the brink of starvation and in the midst of unrelenting hardship. Most lived on milk, oatcakes, and potatoes—the last a South American import that became common in Ireland by the 1650s. Potatoes and grains alike are vulnerable to wet weather; thus, when the summer growing season was cold and wet, the Irish people had nothing to fall back on. During good weather and bad, most Irish men and women lived out their lives in miserable huts, usually of wattle and mud, sometimes of whitewashed stone, but rarely with floors, chimneys, or even the most primitive furniture. They toiled in their landlords' fields, cut their own peat for fuel, and grew potatoes on small plots with only the simplest tools.

For comfort, the majority of Irishmen turned to traditional folkways. One was simple hospitality: sitting around a peat fire in a dark cabin gossiping and telling stories of superstition and the heroes of legend. Sometimes they could welcome one of Ireland's wandering poets, the vestiges of the bardic tradition in which great Celtic families had retained poets and harpers to celebrate clan genealogy and glory. Another folkway was Catholicism, brought to them by hard-pressed priests, most of whom were on the run (for it was the Catholic clergy who suffered most from persecution in Ireland during the Restoration period). Finally, the Irish peasantry enjoyed occasions, such as weddings and wakes, when they could come together with singing, eating, and drinking. The peasants had no education and no books. For news they depended on traveling peddlers. All of these were highly oral activities, which under the circumstances encouraged the telling, retelling, and embroidering of Celtic myths; the manufacture of martyrs; and the fantasizing about the day when the "army of the Gael" would again rise to restore the land to the Irish people. For them, Restoration had not occurred in 1660; it lay in the future.

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Chapter 2

The Revolution of 1688 and the Revolution Settlement

The tumultuous events of 1688–90 marked a decisive moment in British history, the culmination of a half-century of political upheaval, religious crisis, and constitutional experimentation, and in many ways the beginning of the modern period. In the standard interpretation, the Revolution of 1688 laid the groundwork for the remarkable constitutional stability of Britain for the next three centuries by asserting the supremacy of Parliament, the liberties of the individual, the security of property, and the rule of law against the arbitrary power of the Crown—and all without massive bloodletting, in England at least. Not surprisingly, the English have long thought of the developments of 1688 and after as the Glorious Revolution. This view, however, ignores not only the very different way that the revolution played out in Scotland and Ireland, but also the precariousness of what became known as the Revolution Settlement. It took another twenty-five years for the English to resolve many of the constitutional issues between Crown and Parliament that had been contested since early in the seventeenth century—and even longer for the Settlement to *take* in Scotland and Ireland (and one could argue that in many parts of Ireland, it never did).

Many of these crucial changes in politics and constitution derived from the international conflict in which the peoples of the British Isles found themselves in the late seventeenth century. The Revolution of 1688 was not an exclusively *English* event: it not only affected all of the British Isles, but it also formed part of the wider story of European power politics, particularly the rivalry between France and the Dutch Republic. Thus, the political turmoil of 1688 necessarily involved England in two major European wars, during which the English asserted their influence on a new scale. These processes—the successful rebellion of 1688, the constitutional settlement, and the expansion of English power—were three sides of the same triangle.

 From the Restoration through the Revolution Settlement

1660	The Restoration; Charles II succeeds to the English and Scottish thrones
1673	Parliament passes the Test Act
1678	The Popish Plot
1679–81	The Exclusion Crisis
1685	Accession of James II (of England, Wales, and Ireland)/VII (of Scotland)
1688	The Glorious Revolution; invasion of William of Orange; overthrow of James II in England
1689	Battle of the Boyne; final flight of James from the British Isles; Battle of Dunkeld; defeat of Jacobite forces in Scotland; beginning of the War of the League of Augsburg
1691	Treaty of Limerick; defeat of Jacobite forces in Ireland
1692	Massacre of Glencoe
1694	Creation of the Bank of England
1701	Beginning of the War of Spanish Succession
1702	Accession of Queen Anne
1707	Union of England and Scotland
1713	Treaty of Utrecht
1714	Hanoverian succession; accession of George I

THE REIGN OF CHARLES II, 1660–1685

To understand the events of 1688 and after, we must begin with the Restoration and the reigns of two brothers, Charles II and James II. On May 8, 1660, Charles Stuart returned from exile and was proclaimed king of England, Scotland, and Ireland. This Restoration of the monarchy ended eleven years of rule by Parliament and its army, dominated throughout by Oliver Cromwell. Despite the joyous celebration that greeted Charles's return from exile, many of the constitutional issues that had torn England apart since the early years of the century remained unresolved. Charles II survived partly by virtue of his personal qualities and partly by exploiting the fear of civil war. The "Merry Monarch" was a splendid politician, determined not to "go on his travels" again and therefore prepared to give way before a crisis on most issues. He was also a man of few principles and a master of dissimulation. Although indolent, Charles possessed grace and wit. Because of the widespread relief at being out from under the bony thumb of Puritanism, the *political nation* (those with a say in political affairs) was more than

ready to forgive, and even to appreciate, his many mistresses, his lusty appetites, and his hearty enjoyment of sport with his rakish young friends. Ever the pragmatist and shrewd tactician, Charles held dear only one principle: legitimate succession to the throne.

Not even religious belief was vitally important to him. Charles was the cousin of Louis XIV and had spent much of his exile in France; consequently, many Englishmen suspected that he was a Catholic. But Charles remained a regular communicant in the Anglican church, converting to Catholicism only on his deathbed. In public policy, he preferred toleration; hence, the Clarendon Code, with its penal laws directed against Protestant dissenters, did not originate with him. In 1672, Charles suspended the penal laws by his Declaration of Indulgence, an act of the royal prerogative (independent royal authority). But when Parliament pressured him to cancel the Declaration of Indulgence, he bent to its wish, and the next year, when Parliament passed the Test Act (1673), requiring all Crown officeholders to take the sacraments in the Anglican church, swear the oath of supremacy, and deny the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, Charles signed it. Throughout his reign, Charles took care never to appear as an enemy of Protestantism, nor to alienate the Anglican establishment and its supporters.

In another potentially dangerous matter—royal finances—Charles again avoided ultimate confrontation with the English Parliament and the country even though he never thought he had enough money. His first Parliament granted him for life far greater revenues than his predecessors had ever enjoyed, but Charles was supposed to “live of his own”—that is, conduct the ordinary affairs of government on these revenues—and expected to return to Parliament to seek money for extraordinary expenses, such as he incurred in two wars against the Dutch Republic (1665–67 and 1672–74). By keeping Charles on a short leash, Parliament meant to retain some control over his conduct of affairs. In fact, however, the short leash made Charles partly dependent on Louis XIV, monarch of the richest and most powerful nation in Europe, and put Crown and Parliament on a collision course.

The issue over which Charles clashed with Parliament most fiercely was the proposed exclusion from the throne of his heir, his brother James, duke of York. Much to Charles’s annoyance, James had converted to Catholicism in 1668. James tended thereafter to display the zeal characteristic of converts. Where Charles was clever and flexible, James was far more rigid. From the early 1670s, the desire grew among many Protestants to keep James from succeeding to his inheritance, and then reached a fever pitch in 1678

with the so-called Popish Plot. This unsavory episode originated with Titus Oates, a former Anglican clergyman who had been convicted of perjury and accused of sodomy. Oates converted to Catholicism, but even so, he insisted he had uncovered a Jesuit plot to assassinate Charles II and replace him with James. The plot was a fantasy, but more than twenty innocent men were executed in the resulting panic.

The bogus Popish Plot helped spark the most serious struggle between Charles and his Parliament: the Exclusion Crisis. In 1679, the House of Commons passed a bill that would have excluded James from the succession. Many members of Parliament (MPs) hoped to substitute Charles's illegitimate son, the duke of Monmouth. A handsome young man of considerable physical prowess and charm, Monmouth was also a Protestant. Charles doted on this favorite child, but he would not allow him to supplant James. To defend the legitimacy of the succession, Charles deployed one of the strongest weapons still in the monarch's political arsenal: he dissolved Parliament. In 1680, a new House of Commons passed a second Exclusion Bill, and the exclusion of James remained such a threat that Charles dissolved Parliament twice more in 1681. It did not meet again in his lifetime.

The Exclusion Crisis of 1679–81 brought about the formation of political parties in England that were restricted to the tiny political nation consisting of the aristocracy and gentry, plus perhaps 250,000 voters. Those who proposed to exclude James became known as the *Whigs*, a derisive label first applied to the ultra-Protestant Covenanter rebels of Scotland. Although certainly not republicans or democrats, the Whigs opposed royal absolutism, advocated limited monarchy, and defended individual liberties, which in that day meant not only personal freedom, but also the untrammelled right to exploit private property. They tended to favor the growing commercial sector and to view trade rather than land as the life blood of the English economy. The Whigs were also fierce defenders of Protestantism, which they equated with the rule of law and free Parliaments. To them, Roman Catholicism meant *popery*, and popery necessarily led to absolutism, particularly because James, in their eyes, had so alienated the Protestant people of England that he inevitably must try to rule absolutely.

The *Tories*—their label taken from Irish rebels—were devoted to divine right monarchy, though not necessarily to rule by royal prerogative. They were concerned with maintaining order in the state, which implied protection of the divinely established social hierarchy with the king at the top. They felt especially strongly about maintaining the power of society's "natural" rulers—the aristocracy and gentry—in local matters. The Tories saw

themselves as defenders of societal harmony and the Whigs as proponents of demagoguery, faction, and rebellion. They believed that an established church was essential to social unity and so, unlike the Whigs, they rejected toleration of Dissent. In short, the Tories took the Crown and the Anglican church as the twin pillars of social order and peace.

Charles resisted depending on either party, for while in exile he had learned to trust no man or set of advisers. As one official wrote, "He lived with his ministers as he did with his mistresses; he used them, but he was not in love with them." The parties as yet had no means of forcing the king to accept a particular group of advisers for any length of time. Nor could the Crown control Parliament, even with the liberal application of government bribery. The inability of Charles to command the Commons during the Exclusion Crisis proved that, from the king's point of view, a more certain means of control was mandatory.

Cushioned by Louis XIV's financial support, Charles chose to do without Parliament altogether until he could assure himself of a majority of members of Parliament. From 1681 until his death in 1685, Charles used his prerogative powers to revise the composition of the voting constituencies of the boroughs (that is, towns chartered by the Crown) in order to make them politically favorable. Similarly, he tried to win control over the militia and local government by purging Whigs from the ranks of the lords lieutenant (the chief political officers or royal representatives in the counties), sheriffs, and justices of the peace. This royalist intervention in local power politics alarmed not only Whigs but also Tories who treasured their autonomy. Nevertheless, the extraordinary Tory fear of a recurrence of civil war prevented a confrontation between the king and a united class of landowners. The Tories hastened to support the monarchy. Charles was also fortunate in dying in 1685: he had failed to bring about toleration of Catholics, but he had throttled his opponents and then died at the peak of the Tory reaction.

WHIGS AND TORIES REBEL, 1685–1688

His brother James was to be far less fortunate. Given the opposition to him during the Exclusion Crisis, James succeeded his brother with surprising ease in 1685. The Parliament he summoned immediately after his accession was almost uniformly Tory and eager to please him, a result of Charles's careful remolding of parliamentary constituencies. Parliament granted James for life almost twice as much in annual revenues as Charles II had enjoyed.

Moreover, when James faced armed rebellion in the early months of his reign, he received the backing not only of Parliament but also of the aristocracy and gentry, both Whig and Tory. Three months after James took the throne, the earl of Argyll, head of the troublesome Campbell clan, returned from exile with the intention of overthrowing him. The Scottish government moved preemptively against the Argyll clan, however, and swiftly quelled the threat.

One month later, James faced a more serious rebellion. In June 1685, Charles's bastard son, the duke of Monmouth, landed in Dorset with a small force. Monmouth claimed that James had usurped the throne and now threatened the Protestant religion and the rights of Englishmen. Such a claim appealed to the remnants of Puritanism and radicalism found among the artisans and small farmers of the West Country. In a final manifestation of support for the "good old cause," about six thousand men joined Monmouth. But the crucial Whig and Tory gentry did not, nor did radicals in the rest of England. The king's army defeated Monmouth's ragtag and pathetic rebels at Sedgemoor in July. Fierce reprisals against the rebels followed. Monmouth was executed and Judge George Jeffreys carried out a savage judicial repression of those who had followed the duke into battle. "Good God!" Jeffreys exclaimed, "That we should live in such an age, when men call God to protect them in a rebellion." More than three hundred men (and a few women) were hanged, their corpses left dangling until they rotted, in the Bloody Assizes. Thousands were deported to the colonies. The landed elite were inclined to think that the rebels got what they deserved.

The failure of Monmouth's rebellion indicated the political nation's willingness to cooperate with James, yet the new king quickly squandered this good will. He and his Parliament were soon at odds. James was an apprehensive and suspicious man. He believed himself to be divinely anointed, yet this elevated idea of his status as a king gave him no sense of security. He feared what he knew of the English—their inclination toward faction and obstreperous opposition, not to mention regicide. He regarded concession and compromise as signs of weakness and independent opinion as a badge of disloyalty. In his anxiety, James assumed any opposition was a harbinger of rebellion. Never in English history was there such a clear case of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Even James's religious policies bore the marks of his apprehensiveness. In his own time, James was thought of as a king who would destroy the Church of England and return the nation to Roman Catholicism. He was indeed an ardent Catholic who insisted on attending mass in public, tended

to trust only Catholic advisers, viewed Protestants as heretics, and opened diplomatic relations with Rome. But although James frequently spoke of *establishing* the Catholic church in England, he was not misguided enough to think he could make Catholicism the state church in his own lifetime. He was keenly aware that, at the time of his accession, the heirs to the throne—his daughters (by his first wife), Mary and Anne—were both Protestants. Apparently James reasoned that, to protect Catholicism in England, he would have to move swiftly to establish it on a more secure basis—that is, free from the penalties of the penal laws. He imagined that, once Catholicism was free from the penal code, converts would multiply. Thus, despite the obvious difficulties, James was determined to execute his Catholic policy. As he admitted, if he had just kept his religion a private matter, he would have had a successful reign, “but, having been called by Almighty God to rule these kingdoms, he would think of nothing but the propagation of the Catholic religion . . . for which he had been and always would be willing to sacrifice everything, regardless of any mere temporal situation.”

James pursued his *Catholicizing* aims aggressively. He encouraged Catholic priests to return to England, allowed them to proselytize by education and propaganda, exchanged representatives with the Vatican, accepted a vicar apostolic (bishop) from Rome, and even took two Jesuits into his intimate circle. In 1686, he began the tactic of *closeting* members of Parliament—meeting with them individually and pressuring them to repeal the Test Act and the penal laws against Catholics. James also issued numerous dispensations from the Test Act to enable Catholics to take office. All of these acts deeply disturbed English Protestants, who believed that the king was undermining the laws, the constitution, and the Church of England.

James’s actions also roused opposition on a second front—defense of parliamentary liberties. The MPs feared that James’s Catholic policy formed part of a wider project of remaking English government along the lines of absolutist France. Their fears were not ungrounded. James said more than once that “he had rather reign one month as the King of France, than twenty years as his brother the King of England had.”¹

Once his accession was ensured, James moved rapidly to centralize his power and to establish a modern state bureaucracy that could implement his bidding more efficiently and effectively, and most crucially, to establish a standing army. Inheriting a weak military force of just nine thousand troops, he expanded the number of men at arms to forty thousand. James’s

¹Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution*, 162.



Playing card: A Jesuit Preaching against our Bible. This playing card, one of a set made in 1688 or 1689, depicts Jesuit missionaries in England during James II's reign. The card set illustrates the hostility incurred by the king's Catholicizing policies.

solution to the question of how to house this suddenly enlarged force illustrates the growing reach of the Stuart state: his government counted and mapped the available beds in every English inn and tavern and then threatened to revoke the trade licenses of any uncooperative innkeeper. In towns and villages throughout England, the army was now a physical presence. Moreover, in violation of the Test Act, James appointed Catholics as military officers. His growing military power and his defiance of parliament convinced the political nation—Tories included—that their liberties and their power were under threat.

Moreover, James's policies destroyed any chance he had of maintaining an alliance with the Church of England, which had been a bulwark of royal legitimacy and had adopted a posture of passive obedience to the king's will. James aggravated his relations with the Church by reestablishing in new form the old prerogative Court of High Commission, by which he disciplined recalcitrant clergymen. He also sought to break the Anglican monopoly over higher education by opening Oxford and Cambridge to Catholics. When, however, he attempted to Catholicize Oxford's Magdalen College, the fellows (all of whom were Anglican clergymen) resisted. James then

removed the fellows from their posts, which struck English Protestants not only as a blow to Protestantism, but also as a threat to the rights of private property.

By the spring of 1687, the growing divide between James and the Church of England convinced the king that his best hope of support lay with the Protestant Dissenters rather than with the Anglicans. Thus, in April he issued a Declaration of Indulgence, suspending by royal edict the Test Act and penal laws against Catholics and Dissenters alike. His strategy put the Dissenters in a quandary. They resented the political restrictions and at times outright religious persecution that they had endured since the Restoration. But although the Dissenters welcomed toleration, they did not trust its author, James. As the descendants of the Puritans, they had long been more hostile to Roman Catholicism than had Anglicans. Many Dissenters agreed with the marquis of Halifax, who described any alliance of Dissent with the king as “bringing together the two most contrary things that are in the world.” They concluded that the threat James posed to English civil liberty trumped any religious freedom that he might offer and increasingly opted for allying with Anglicans against the king.

James, however, pressed on doggedly with his plan of establishing toleration in order to secure Catholic freedom and his crown. Like Charles II, he embarked on a purge of the boroughs, the lord lieutenancies, the magistracy, and Parliament—but now the purged individuals were Tories. Between 1687 and 1688, a remarkable 75 percent of local government officials lost their places. Then, in April 1688, James reissued the Declaration of Indulgence, and in May ordered the Church of England to have it read aloud in all its parish churches. This demand was too much even for the most passive Anglicans, for it required them to participate in propagating what they regarded as religious error. Seven Anglican bishops, including the archbishop of Canterbury, petitioned James on the grounds that his prerogative powers gave him no right to force the clergy to read the Declaration. Surprised and outraged by the petition, James had the seven tried for seditious libel. He, however, failed to win a verdict of guilty. Dissenters and Anglicans alike rallied round the bishops, and London crowds cheered them when they were acquitted.

Thus, in only three years James had succeeded in alienating Whigs and Tories, Anglicans and Dissenters. The announcement of a surprising pregnancy only increased this alienation. One of the reasons that Protestants had accepted James was that his heirs were Protestant. James was fifty-one when he acceded to the throne, and his second wife, the Catholic Mary of

Modena, was thought to be infertile. But in November 1687, she announced to a skeptical England that she was with child. On June 10, 1688, Mary gave birth to a son, which meant that James's Catholic goals would be continued. Frantic Protestant propaganda suggested that the baby was not the queen's child, but had been smuggled into the royal bedchamber in a warming pan.

By mid-1688, Richard Hampden observed that "the whole nation is alienated from the government in their inclination." A radical opponent of James, Hampden was perhaps not the most trustworthy observer, yet even James's supporters noted how popular sentiment had turned against the king. One soldier stationed in Wales noted "how prone all were to mutter about breach of laws, and invading of religion," and cautioned that "many who said Well Well thought very evil."² Hence, the atmosphere in the early summer of 1688 was full of hysteria and intrigue. On the evening of June 30, just twenty days after the baby's birth and the same day the bishops were acquitted, seven men—six English nobles and one bishop, three of them Tories and four Whigs—wrote William of Orange, the Protestant stadholder (governor of the provinces of the Dutch Republic and, ironically, James's nephew and son-in-law). They asked William to come to England with an army to assist them in resolving their problems with James. The "Invitation of the Seven" assured William that "nineteen parts of twenty of the people" backed their actions.

WILLIAM III AND THE REVOLUTION IN ENGLAND

William, in fact, had already made up his mind to intervene in England. His agents were in frequent contact with English political leaders, and he had been carefully watching English affairs for years. A cautious, shrewd opportunist, William sought to take advantage of the English opposition to James in order to fulfill the great goal of his life: to block the expansion of Louis XIV's France.

The hawk-nosed, thin, and chronically ill William of Orange was a silent and moody man who would become an unpopular king of England. He was not a brilliant politician or soldier, but he had a dogged tenacity that served him well. He believed God had assigned him a monumental task: to defeat the Catholic France of the Sun King. His design on England was simply to commit England against France, or at least to keep it neutral. A grandson of Charles I and husband of Mary, eldest daughter and heiress presumptive to

²Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution*, 226.

James II, William harbored no desire to diminish the power of the English Crown. From his point of view, the ideal would be for England to escape civil war with the monarchy intact for Mary to inherit, meanwhile allying with the Dutch against France. Alas, James was destroying any chance for the ideal to become real.

The decisive event for William was the birth of an heir to James and Mary of Modena—which William was all too ready to consider as a fraud perpetrated by the Jesuits. In April 1688, he decided to invade England, if, as the Whig Gilbert Burnet wrote, “invited by some men of the best interest to . . . come and rescue the nation and the religion.” His agents in England told him that most of the Whig and Tory aristocracy and gentry had become disaffected from James and that the royal army would not fight. An invasion in sufficient strength would succeed.

William’s fleet of 275 ships, carrying an army of 15,000 men, sailed on October 30, taking advantage of an unusual wind blowing from the east. This “Protestant wind,” coupled with indecision in the English navy, stranded James’s fleet in the mouth of the Thames. William’s army landed unopposed near Exeter, his banner proclaiming “The Protestant Religion and the Liberties of England.” The manifesto William circulated cleverly stated the purposes of his invasion: it rehearsed the long list of complaints about James’s attack on the Church, the parliamentary boroughs, and the privileges of the county elite; it asserted the rights of Parliament as against James’s unlawful use of the prerogative; and it promised election of a free Parliament and investigation of the birth of the new baby prince.

While the Whigs threw their support to William, it was uncertain whether the Tory landlords would remain loyal to James and legitimacy. James hastily reversed his recent policies in order to appeal to the Tories, reinstating, for example, the fellows of Magdalen College. But the Tories no longer trusted James, who in early 1688 had horrified English Protestants by importing three thousand Catholic troops from Ireland. James forced the Tories to choose between the Church and their local power on the one hand and the principle of monarchical legitimacy on the other. They chose the Church and their local power.

If the people had rallied to James, William perhaps would have been thrown back into the sea. But they did not. As William began his slow, deliberate march from Exeter to London, ordinary people, as well as members of the aristocracy and gentry, joined his cause. In York, for example, a force of three thousand Williamite supporters—described by an observer as “a diabolical rabble”—seized the city, while in the manufacturing city of

Manchester, men of the “ordinary sort” had to be turned away from the Williamite ranks because “the Prince of Orange had foot enough, it was horse he wanted.”³ James could not depend even on his army. Although it was far larger than William’s, it was weakened by a stream of desertions, the most important of which was that by John Churchill, the greatest soldier in England.

As his army retreated toward London without fighting, James lost his nerve—and then his crown. On December 8, he sent the queen and the baby prince to France and fled himself two days later. He did not abdicate, but he apparently sought to bring all government to a halt because he disbanded the royal army and threw the Great Seal into the Thames River. England hovered on the brink of chaos as mobs targeted tax collectors and others who symbolized James’s absolutist ambitions and as anti-Catholic riots erupted in London. Nearly all the aristocracy and gentry now looked to William to keep public order. William could not have hoped for a better chain of events, which was spoiled only by some Kentish fishermen who captured James and returned him to London. William had no intention of making a martyr of James; hence, he arranged for James to escape again, this time successfully.

With the administration of the nation already effectively in his hands, William summoned a Convention Parliament in January 1689 to settle affairs. This Convention Parliament faced a complicated question: Who was now the monarch and by what right? All agreed that William should run the country, but not necessarily as king. The Whigs argued, as they had done in the Exclusion Crisis, that the monarchy existed for the utility of its subjects. If the king broke the original *social contract* by which civil society had been initially formed, then the people, through their representatives, had the right to depose him and select a new monarch. This view received its clearest statement by John Locke in his *Two Treatises of Government*, which he wrote during the Exclusion Crisis but published first in 1689. The Whigs, therefore, did not hesitate to interrupt the strict line of succession and to have Parliament act as the source of the royal title. Under Whig influence, the House of Commons resolved that James had broken the original contract and by fleeing the country had abdicated the throne.

The Tories, however, remained reluctant to abandon their adherence to the legitimate succession. They abhorred the notion of an elected monar-

³Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution*, 238–239.

chy, to which they believed Whig logic inexorably led. Few had resisted William's invasion but none was happy about taking arms against the king, which contradicted their deep-seated patriarchal view of social and political order. In short, the Tories were confused. As one gentleman wrote, "How these risings and associations can be justified, I see not; but yet it is very apparent had not the Prince come and these persons thus appeared, our religion had been rooted out." Hence, the Tories, who had considerable power in the House of Lords, insisted that the throne was not and never could be vacant, and preferred to make William and Mary regents for James.

William settled the argument in characteristically abrupt fashion. He refused to act as regent for James or to serve as mere consort to Mary. Mary, ever the submissive wife, agreed. In the face of William's firm stand, the Lords gave way. William and Mary received the crown jointly. William now had a firm grip on the reins of English policy, following an invasion that few resisted and a settlement of the throne that defied logic.

Many historians argue that this change of rulers was no revolution but rather a rebellion instigated by one section of the English ruling order, the Whigs, and more or less reluctantly accepted by another, the Tories. The real revolution, in this interpretation, came in events subsequent to the change of rulers—the alteration of the English constitution known as *the Revolution Settlement*. Along with the crown, Parliament presented William and Mary with the Declaration of Rights (enacted in 1689 as the Bill of Rights). This famous act prevented the monarchy from continuing certain of James's objectionable practices. It declared illegal the royal power of dispensing with and suspending laws, abolished all prerogative courts, forbade taxation without parliamentary approval, prohibited the raising of an army without parliamentary consent, asserted that parliamentary elections should be free, and mandated that the monarch could neither be a Catholic nor marry one. In the long run, the Bill of Rights helped establish the rule of law, free speech for Parliament, and the power of the landed elite.

In addition to the Bill of Rights, the Revolution Settlement included four significant constitutional changes. First, the Mutiny Act (1689) was passed for a year only; thereafter, the monarch could maintain discipline in the military services only if Parliament met annually and renewed the Mutiny Act. Second, a new coronation oath required the monarch to govern England according to the laws agreed to by Parliament. Third, William voluntarily pledged that judges would serve on good behavior rather than at the king's pleasure. And finally, in 1694, Parliament provided for frequent

elections by passing the Triennial Act. All of these measures represented a significant expansion of parliamentary power and judicial independence vis à vis the Crown

Of even greater consequence was the financial settlement that evolved during William's lifetime. Parliament refused to grant William revenues for life, thereby forcing him to consult Parliament frequently for funds. The financial restriction became all the more important because, as we will see below, William was at war with the French from 1689 almost to his death in 1702. The revenues required were enormous, and only Parliament could grant them. William's need to seek funding regularly from Parliament gave MPs the opportunity to inquire about how the funds were spent, a powerful means of oversight on executive activities. The king still functioned as first minister, but with the power of the purse in hand, Parliament (especially the House of Commons) had won a much more powerful role in the workings of the constitution.

The Parliament of 1689 also settled the religious issue, and in a way that was to last for nearly 150 years. Given the alliance between Anglicans and Dissenters that had emerged in 1688, some kind of religious freedom for Dissenters was inevitable. The toleration that Dissenters won in 1689 was, however, narrow. It simply exempted from the penalties of the Clarendon Code all who would swear allegiance to the Crown and deny Catholic doctrines of the mass. Henceforward, Dissenters—but not Catholics or Jews—could worship freely in their own chapels (provided the doors were unlocked), but they remained second-class citizens. They were still excluded from Oxford and Cambridge, they had to pay tithes to the Church of England, they could not hold national or municipal office, and they could not sit in Parliament without taking communion according to Anglican rites. Dissent had won civil *relief* rather than civil *rights*.

The final step in the Revolution Settlement came in 1701 with the Act of Settlement. The Bill of Rights had declared that Mary's sister, Anne, would succeed after William and Mary both died. Anne was a strong Anglican, and it was expected that her eldest son would succeed her, thus keeping the crown on a Protestant brow. But though the unfortunate Anne had seventeen pregnancies between 1683 and 1700, none of her children survived childhood. Parliament felt compelled to pass the succession to the Electress Sophia of Hanover, the nearest Protestant relation. The Act of Settlement did this, along with insisting that all English monarchs be Anglicans. In this way, Parliament clearly affirmed its authority over the succession and limited the power of the Crown.

THE REVOLUTION IN IRELAND, 1688–1691

In England, William's army faced little resistance. The situation, however, was far different in Ireland, where the events of 1688 brought about large-scale warfare that was of great significance in the European-wide struggle between William's Grand Alliance and France, as well as in the century-long struggle between native Catholics and Protestants planted in Ireland to secure the island for the English monarchy. James II made his stand in Ireland; as a result, for the Irish, the Glorious Revolution was far from glorious and very bloody indeed.

During the reign of Charles II, two issues—land and religion—dominated Irish public affairs and ensured ongoing instability. The Restoration disappointed most expropriated Irish Catholic landowners: with only a small percentage restored to their estates, the vast majority sought ceaselessly to reclaim their land. Protestants from England and Scotland, who now controlled 80 percent of Irish landholdings and dominated the Irish Parliament (on the rare occasions when it met), lived in fear that the Catholics might recover their land. At the same time, the Restoration religious settlement, which reimposed the Episcopal Church of Ireland, disappointed not only Catholics but also Protestant Nonconformists. Ulster Presbyterians had supported the Restoration in hopes of having Presbyterianism established throughout Ireland, but it brought instead the condemnation of the Covenant (see chapter 1) as treasonous. Charles's rule was maintained only by the firmness and moderation of his viceroy, the duke of Ormond, head of one of Ireland's oldest and most loyal Protestant families.

When James succeeded Charles, he was determined to pursue an aggressive Catholicizing policy in Ireland. Implementing this policy fell to the Irish Catholic Richard Talbot. A swaggering adventurer and incorrigible liar, Talbot was a member of James's household and one of the principal agents of the Catholic ex-landowners. Raised to the peerage in 1685 as the earl of Tyrconnell, Talbot became lord lieutenant of Ireland in 1687, much to the delight of Catholics and the horror of Protestants. As one Englishman wrote, "Lord Tyrconnell has gone to succeed the lord lieutenant in Ireland, to the astonishment of all sober men, and to the evident ruin of the protestants in that kingdom." Tyrconnell increased the size of the Irish army with Catholic recruits, staffed it with Catholic officers, and placed Catholics in key local political positions.

When William invaded England, Tyrconnell held Ireland for James. But the Ulster Protestants quickly raised troops for William; seized control of

several walled towns, including Derry (always called Londonderry by Protestants); and proclaimed William and Mary king and queen. Civil war in Ireland began, characterized by the pitiless brutality that religious conflict often inspires. In March 1689, James himself arrived in Ireland from France. James intended not to make Ireland independent but with French assistance to defeat the Irish Protestants and then lead a Catholic army against England. He laid siege to Derry, which held out in the face of overwhelming strength and terrible hardship. "This garrison hath lived upon cats, dogs and horse flesh this three days; above 5000 of our men are dead already for want of meat and those that survive are so weak that they can scarce creep to the walls, where many of them die every night at their post," reported Derry's governors as the siege wore on.⁴ The suffering continued until William's ships lifted the siege of Derry at the end of July—one of the great moments in Ulster Protestant historical memory.

The actions of a new Irish Parliament (the Patriot Parliament), which sat in the early summer of 1689, accentuated the desperate urgency with which the Irish Protestants fought in this war. Overwhelmingly Catholic, the Patriot Parliament expressed the land hunger and the anti-English resentments of the native Irish elite—sentiments that the thoroughly English James disliked but could not resist. It asserted the exclusive right of Irish Parliaments to legislate for Ireland, enacted religious toleration, and repealed the Cromwellian and Restoration land settlements. It also ordered the seizure of the estates of nearly twenty-five hundred Protestants. Together, these acts would have meant the end of Protestant domination of Ireland.

Instead, William and his army strengthened that Protestant domination. William landed in June 1690 with a large and experienced force made up of Dutch, French Huguenot, Danish, English, and Anglo- (and Scots-) Irish troops. On July 12, William's army met and defeated James's army of French regulars and ill-trained Irish peasants on the River Boyne, north of Dublin. Still commemorated by the Protestants of Northern Ireland in patriotic parades, the Battle of the Boyne was the decisive battle in modern Irish history and one of the most important in the larger struggle between William and Louis XIV. James fled to France again, this time for good. Wounded in battle, William returned to England, though the war in Ireland lasted another year. The Williamite troops defeated the French and Irish in an awful bloodletting at Aughrim and then penned them up in the town of

⁴Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution*, 270.

Limerick. Despite the inspired leadership of Patrick Sarsfield, the Irish rebels were forced to surrender in October 1691.

The Treaty of Limerick (1691), which ended the war in Ireland, gave honorable terms to the Irish, but was soon tragically undone. The treaty allowed Irish troops to take service in France if they wished; about eleven thousand did so. It also secured a degree of toleration for Catholics in Ireland, plus protection of property for James's supporters (called Jacobites after *Jacobus*, the Latin for James) who chose to remain in Ireland. William and Mary ratified the Treaty, but the Irish Parliament—once again completely dominated by Protestants—refused to accept its civil articles.

This Parliament, bent on revenge, ignored the provisions for toleration and passed instead a series of laws against Catholics, a *penal code* that was extended in the early eighteenth century (although only sporadically enforced). Aimed at crushing the Catholic gentry, the penal laws prohibited Catholics from buying land or acquiring land from a Protestant by inheritance or marriage. On the death of a Catholic landowner, his land would be divided equally among his sons unless the eldest converted to the Protestant (Anglican) Church of Ireland, in which case he got it all. Catholics could not send their children abroad for education or open schools in Ireland. Catholics could not enter the professions or (after 1727) vote. Catholic bishops were banished, and Catholic priests were required to register and take an oath against the Stuarts.

The penal laws came on top of yet another confiscation of Irish Catholic land—this time the estates of about 270 rebels. By 1700, only one-seventh of all Irish land remained in the hands of Catholics, and the penal code would further reduce that proportion. The Protestant landlords were known thereafter as *the Protestant Ascendancy*, an apt term for this utterly dominant elite.

SCOTLAND: FROM REVOLUTION TO UNION

James VII had advantages in Scotland that (as James II) he did not have in England. First, the tradition of the Scottish Crown was more autocratic than the English and the power of the Scottish Parliament correspondingly weaker. Second, as a Scottish dynasty, the Stuarts touched the patriotism of all Scotsmen, who displayed their support by giving James an enthusiastic welcome when he first visited Scotland in 1679. Finally, as the nominal head of clan Stewart (*Stuart* is an Anglicized version of the clan name), James had a unique claim on the loyalty of the Highlanders. Nevertheless, the

turbulence of the Highlands and the gravity of Scottish religious disputes caused difficulties for James, no less than for any other monarch.

The biggest problem for the Scottish government in the 1670s and 1680s was that the established Church of Scotland was Episcopalian, whereas the religion of the most forceful section of the Lowland Scots was Presbyterian. Fortified by their Covenanting tradition, Presbyterians could not abide prelacy (that is, episcopacy or government by bishops). The Episcopal Church of Scotland thus depended wholly on royal authority and military might. Nevertheless, when James succeeded to the throne of Scotland, the government seemed to be consolidating its power, and James's prospects looked good.

James, however, weakened any advantages he enjoyed in Scotland when he asked the Scottish Parliament to repeal the penal laws against Catholics, but not (at first) those against Presbyterians. Parliament refused, and in 1687 James used his prerogative powers to extend toleration to Catholics. When in June 1688 he also granted indulgence to Presbyterians, it was too late. To make matters worse, James began rearranging parliamentary boroughs in the same way that he had done in England. Still, Scotland remained quiet when William landed in England. James even moved his Scottish troops south to help fend off William—a major mistake, for there went the ultimate source of royal power in Scotland.

James's flight to France in the face of William's invasion left the Royalist party in Scotland in disarray. Many a canny Scottish politician, not wishing to be left out in the cold, hurried to London to make his peace with William. Jacobite power in Scotland was still potentially as great as that of the Williamites, but when William called a Scottish Convention Parliament, the confusion of the Royalists allowed the Whigs and Presbyterians to dominate it. The convention declared that James had *forefaulted* his crown, invited William and Mary to rule jointly, and abolished Episcopalianism in favor of an established Presbyterian church—one shaped by its militants at that.

Seeing this remarkable flow of power to their Whig and Presbyterian opponents, the Scottish Jacobites abandoned Parliament and took up arms against William. Led by John Graham, viscount Dundee, some of the Highland clans rallied to the Stuart cause, partly because of their sense of loyalty to their sworn king, but more significantly because of their hostility to the Campbells (including the new earl of Argyll), who were prominent Whigs. In July 1689, Dundee's Highland host of perhaps three thousand men swept down the slopes of the Pass of Killiecrankie and overwhelmed a royal army. But Dundee himself was killed, and no one else was able to

thwart the natural tendency of clansmen to drift back to their glens after a fight. James sent little assistance, though the Highland leaders declared, "We will all dy with our swords in our hands before we fail in our loyaltie and sworn allegiance." At the little town of Dunkeld, the remaining Highlanders were broken by a disciplined force of Covenanters. The clansmen retired to their remote lairs, beaten for the moment, but not reconciled to William's regime.

To subdue the Highlands, William's government took two steps. First, it built a fort in the heart of the Highlands, Fort William. Second, it sought to bribe the clan chiefs into loyalty. The key figure behind this scheme was the unscrupulous Sir John Dalrymple, the master of Stair, who loathed the Highland clans. Stair coupled bribes with a requirement that clan chiefs complete an oath of allegiance to William by January 1, 1692—in the hopes that, if some chief missed the strict deadline, he could punish that clan as an example to all the others. Ideally, the clan so punished would be the Macdonalds of Glencoe, widely thought to be Catholic.

Stair's hopes were realized. MacIan, chief of the Glencoe Macdonalds, came in five days late after slogging through a blizzard. Stair, probably with William's knowledge, then sought to annihilate the Glencoe Macdonalds by a dishonorable plan. A company of troops (Campbells, of course) were sent to Glencoe, where they claimed traditional Highland hospitality. After spending almost two weeks in the homes of the Macdonalds, the troops in February 1692 rose before dawn and slaughtered all of the clan they could lay their hands on—men, women, and children. About forty Macdonalds were butchered, but most escaped, much to the anger of the master of Stair.

In the short run, the massacre of Glencoe helped quell the clans. In the longer run, however, it alienated them from William's government. Beneath their temporarily lawful behavior, many of the clans continued to harbor strong Jacobite feelings. The Revolution Settlement in Scotland remained precarious.

A three-part economic crisis in the 1690s further imperiled the Revolution Settlement. First, William's long-running war against France hindered Scottish commerce. Scottish merchants found themselves cut off from their Continental trading partners while England imposed tariffs on Scottish imports. Second, by the mid-1690s a series of poor harvests brought famine in their wake. "God helpe the poor people, for I never did sie or hear such outcryes for want of meall," wrote one Scot in 1696. As thousands died, discontent with the political status quo increased. Famine relief efforts were hampered by the third factor in the economic crisis: the *Darien fiasco* that

swallowed up to one-quarter of Scotland's liquid capital and severely restricted the ability (or will) of wealthier Scots to assist the starving. In 1695 the Scottish Parliament sanctioned a colonizing effort in Darien (modern Panama). Across Scottish society, hopeful investors, ranging from small merchants and local lawyers on up to the very wealthiest of the landed elite, as well as many town councils, sank money into the scheme. William, however, opposed the Darien colony because of his desire to placate the Spanish (who also had claims on the region and with whom he was fighting against France). William refused to allow English forces in North America to assist the Darien colonists, and the colony collapsed in just over a year, at the cost of hundreds of lives and hundreds of thousands of pounds.

Scotland's plunge into economic crisis in the 1690s convinced many among the Scottish elite that the existing relations between England and Scotland could not continue. Many thought Scotland must be completely independent; others, however, believed the only remedy to Scotland's economic woes lay in a parliamentary union. "This nation," one argued, "being poor, and without force to protect its commerce, cannot reap great advantage by it, till it partake of the trade and protection of some powerful neighbour nation."

At the same time, William's difficulties in dealing with two Parliaments were leading him to conclude that he was in an impossible constitutional situation. The Scottish Parliament frequently disagreed with his English ministers. Committed to a long war against France, William and his ministers wanted Scotland simply to supply money and troops; instead, Scotland supplied trouble. Most ominously, in 1696 the Scottish Parliament asserted the right to choose a monarch independently from England should there be no Protestant heir to William. By the time William died in 1702, he had become convinced that the monarchy's relationship with two Parliaments could not continue. On his deathbed he advised his ministers to unite the Parliaments of England and Scotland.

Five years later, in 1707, the Act of Union did just that, as a result of both economic and constitutional issues. Frustrated by English restrictions on Scottish commerce, the Scottish Parliament in 1704 once again declared that it would select its own successor to Queen Anne if Scotland were not granted free trade in England's empire. England, however, was too large and too wealthy to be bullied by Scotland. In 1705, the English Parliament declared that, unless Scotland agreed to negotiate a union and accept the Hanover succession, key Scottish imports—including black cattle, linen,

and coal—would be banned, and Scots would be treated as aliens in England (which would limit their rights to any English property they held). These measures struck at Scottish merchants and aristocrats alike. Cut off from English consumers, Scotland's economy faced devastation. Negotiations for a union began. A liberal application of patronage and some outright bribery ensured the passage of the resulting Treaty of Union. The Scottish Parliament voted itself out of existence and the British state into life.

A marriage of convenience rather than affection, the Union united the English and Scottish kingdoms as *Great Britain*. Scotland gave up its separate parliament; instead, sixteen nobles in the House of Lords and forty-five MPs in the House of Commons sat in the *British* Parliament at Westminster. In exchange, the Scots received free trade throughout England and within England's empire, as well as the *Equivalent*, a monetary payment to compensate investors for their losses in the Darien scheme and to encourage Scottish economic development. Scotland's and England's religious establishments and legal systems remained separate, and the Scottish and English peoples retained their separate national identities. As we will see in chapter 5, the Act of Union did not reconcile all Scots to the Revolution Settlement. In both 1715 and 1745, Scottish rebels took up arms in support of the Jacobite cause. Yet a sense of *Britishness* would grow among the peoples of Scotland, Wales, and England over the course of the next century.

FOREIGN WARS

The events of 1688 and after in Scotland, Ireland, and England played out against the backdrop of a European-wide conflagration between the forces led by William III and the armies of Louis XIV. The war that began for England in 1689 was to last even past William's death in 1702; in fact, it continued (except for a brief respite) until 1713. By the end of this protracted and exhausting struggle, England (by then properly known as Britain) had emerged as a great power in Europe.

In 1688, the League of Augsburg—the Dutch Republic, Spain, Sweden, Savoy, the Holy Roman Empire, and some smaller German states—had gone to war against Louis's vainglorious aggression in 1688; French support for James brought the English into it. Thus, for the English the war was primarily a matter of defending William III and deposing James II, but economic motives also came into play: the expansion of French commercial



Europe during the Williamite Wars. William of Orange died in 1702, but the Williamite Wars continued until 1713. The wars helped establish Britain as one of the great powers of Europe.

strength threatened English trading prospects. William himself was mainly concerned with defending Dutch interests and above all with keeping France out of the Spanish Netherlands (roughly, modern Belgium). "Dutch William" used English resources to subsidize his allies, buy mercenaries, and supplement the Dutch navy with the English. Though he was not a great general, he was an able diplomat. With English cash he kept his Grand Alliance together and put pressure on the French, which helped him to achieve his objectives.

The war soon became one of attrition. After the Dutch and English navies defeated the French fleet at La Hogue (1692), the British Isles were safe from a French invasion. The war, however, continued for another weary five years. The Peace of Ryswick of 1697 resulted in important gains for William and for England: Louis recognized William as king of England, allowed the Dutch to garrison forts in the Spanish Netherlands, and ceded Newfoundland and the Hudson Bay territories to England.

Just four years later, however, the conflict between France and its opponents resumed with the War of the Spanish Succession, touched off by the childlessness of Charles II of Spain. This complex struggle taught the English to think for the first time in terms of supporting a balance of power in Europe. For Louis, to install his dynasty on the Spanish throne would be the culmination of his quest for glory, as well as confirmation of French dominance in Europe. For the Dutch, such an augmentation of French power would spell the end of Dutch independence. For the English, French success would threaten anew to restore the Catholic Stuarts, to do grave damage to English commerce with the Continent, and to end their own hopes of feasting on the Spanish Empire. For all these various reasons, the opponents of France formed another Grand Alliance and went to war when Louis claimed the Spanish throne for his grandson in 1701.

William died in 1702, and his successor, Anne, could not personally lead her armies into battle. Overall direction of the allied war effort thus fell to John Churchill, duke of Marlborough, the greatest soldier in Europe. Immensely charming and good-looking, Marlborough was none too fastidious in furthering his own career by exploiting Queen Anne's fondness for him and his wife Sarah, duchess of Marlborough. For nearly ten years, Marlborough was the effective ruler of England. A supreme strategist and diplomat as well as a great battlefield commander, he succeeded in keeping the Grand Alliance together while leading its armies in another war of attrition against France. Between 1702 and 1709, he directed the allied army to



Blenheim Palace. Built between 1705 and 1720, this monumental country house (one of the largest in England) was a reward to the Duke of Marlborough for his military victories against France. It became the country seat of the Churchill family; in 1874, Winston Churchill was born in one of its many rooms.

an unprecedented series of victories in set-piece battles: Blenheim (1704), Ramillies (1706), Oudenarde (1708), and Malplaquet (1709). He was rewarded with the highest honors England could bestow, including his famous house, Blenheim Palace.

Marlborough failed, however, to take advantage of the allies' strong position to settle with France in 1708, and as the war dragged on, Tory opposition grew stronger. To the backwoods Tory gentry, Marlborough's unreasonable demands on the French were unnecessarily prolonging a bloody and expensive war. In 1710, a general election put a Tory peace ministry in office; a year later, Marlborough was dismissed. The Tories succeeded in negotiating the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, leaving Britain's allies to settle with France as best they could. One such ally, Prince George, elector of Hanover and Queen Anne's heir presumptive, was furious that the British left Hanover and the rest of the Grand Alliance in the lurch. The Whigs, too, condemned the treaty for selling out the war effort.

Nevertheless, the Treaty of Utrecht won real gains for Great Britain. The British recognized Louis's grandson as king of Spain, but on condition that the crowns of France and Spain never be joined. The Spanish Netherlands were divorced from Spain and garrisoned by the Dutch. Further, the British



The British Empire in 1713. As a result of the Treaty of Utrecht at the end of the Williamite Wars, Britain established its claim to Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, St. Kitts, Gibraltar, and Minorca. More important, however, is what the map does not show: the British won the right to trade in the Spanish Empire, a lucrative prize indeed.

acquired or were confirmed in important colonial holdings: Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, St. Kitts, Gibraltar, and Minorca. Finally, they won the *Asiento*, the right to trade in the Spanish Empire and the symbol of England's displacement of France as the chief predator in the Spanish Empire.

THE FINANCIAL REVOLUTION

These military and commercial gains were closely intertwined with a set of fiscal innovations so striking that historians call these developments the Financial Revolution. As we noted above, an important part of the Revolution Settlement was parliamentary control of the purse. To pay for the tremendous costs of the wars, William and Anne had to turn to Parliament, which in these years became a unique instrument of financial power. Through Parliament, William and Anne were able, by consent of the social and political elite, to gain access to England's wealth through new taxes. William, for example, levied taxes at a level undreamed of by his predecessors—an annual average more than twice the revenues of James II. The land tax was the key, raising almost one-half of total revenues, a sure sign of the landowners' willingness to pay for their revolution.

Taxes, however, paid for only two-thirds of the cost of war and constituted only one element of the Financial Revolution. To pay for the remaining third of the war's costs, Parliament authorized William to borrow money and, even more importantly, by voting for taxes to pay the interest on the loans, created the concept of the *national debt*. To manage this new and rapidly growing national debt and to help mobilize credit for the government, Parliament formed the Bank of England in 1694. The centerpiece of the Financial Revolution, the bank served a crucial public function in financing the war—and the remarkable century of British imperial and economic expansion that followed. One way that the bank injected credit into the economy was by issuing reliable paper bank notes. Paper money became part and parcel of daily life, and paper credit in the form not only of bank notes but also stock certificates and bonds became an important tool for creating a modern economy. In addition to the Bank of England, the East India Company (1709) and the South Sea Company (1711) were chartered in part to finance the national debt. Financiers and bankers—the “monied men,” most of them Whigs—emerged as powerful political interests, who made great profits from this new financial environment. The entire *monied interest* had a stake in continuing the wars and was hated by the Tories (who paid the bulk of the land tax). There can be no doubt,

however, that this greedy financial clique played an important role in making England a great power.

THE HANOVERIAN SUCCESSION, 1714

By the time the Treaty of Utrecht ended war with France in 1713, the English had defended their successful rebellion of 1688, forced a political union on Scotland, developed strong public financial institutions, and become a great power in Europe. Yet nearly a quarter of a century after the revolution, the Revolution Settlement still seemed shaky. Prince George of Hanover, Anne's heir, was distinctly unpopular with the Tories, who in the waning years of Anne's reign began to flirt with the idea of restoring the Stuart dynasty to the throne. To many, James II's son, James Edward, seemed preferable to a German Lutheran. Called "The Old Pretender," James Edward had grown up in France, supported by Louis XIV, who recognized him as King James III of England when his father died in 1701.

Tory Jacobitism had been growing since Anne's accession. Jacobite sentiments fed not only on Tory resentment at the prolonged war, but also on belief in hereditary divine right and the authority of the Established Church. Many Tories still regarded the Stuart dynasty as ordained by God to rule England. They dismissed William's reign as a one-time aberration and believed that the Stuart dynasty—Mary, Anne, and now The Old Pretender—constituted the only legitimate occupants of the throne. Such Tories also tended to dislike what they regarded as the subordination of the Anglican Church to the state and to view the Revolution Settlement's religious toleration as a threat to right religion. They were particularly outraged by *occasional conformity*, a practice that allowed Dissenters to hold municipal and state offices, in violation of the Clarendon Code and the Test Act, provided that they took communion once a year in the established Church. The Tories succeeded in abolishing occasional conformity in 1711, but they recognized that George's Whiggish respect for toleration meant that, if he became king, the practice would resume. Such a prospect horrified these staunch advocates of establishment.

As a result, a number of Tories began conspiring to deny the throne to George and to restore it to James; how many were involved and how far they went are not clear. Robert Harley (earl of Oxford) and Henry St. John (viscount Bolingbroke), the leaders of the Tory ministry that signed the Peace of Utrecht, certainly flirted with Jacobitism. They tried to persuade The Old

Pretender to convert to Anglicanism, which would have solved their central problem, but James did not regard the English throne as worth the price of renouncing his religion. Hence, when Anne died on August 1, 1714, and the Privy Council proclaimed George I king, his accession met no resistance. The installation of the Hanoverian line saved the Revolution Settlement, and England entered a period of remarkable stability, commercial prosperity, and imperial expansion.

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Chapter 3

Society and Economy in Eighteenth-Century England

The rebellion of 1688 and the subsequent Revolution Settlement set the stage for the golden age of the English landlords. Having secured the rule of law (which they wrote and enforced), the rights of property (which they defined and enjoyed), and the power of Parliament (which they monopolized and wielded), the English landed magnates surveyed Britain from a pinnacle of wealth and power. The society over which they ruled seemed one of stability and cohesiveness, whether viewed in terms of the culture, the social order, or the economy. The landed elite's serene domination of the nation resembled Caesar Augustus's rule of the early Roman Empire; hence, eighteenth-century England has long been labeled the *Augustan Age*.

In fact, however, the eighteenth century was a time of contrast and paradox—between the majestic stability of the social hierarchy and the unseemly scramble of people for higher rungs on the social ladder, between the warmth of paternalist social relations and the naked lust for power, between the breathtaking wealth of a few and the heartbreaking poverty of the many, between the rituals of deference given by inferiors to superiors and the startling frequency of riots, and above all between the security of custom on the one hand and the opportunities offered by commercialism on the other. The problem for the historian of eighteenth-century England is not to find “the truth that lies in between” these contrasts, but to see how all of them can have been true at once.

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE: AN OPEN HIERARCHY

The key feature of eighteenth-century English society was that it was arranged as a *status hierarchy*, not as a class society. In the sense that a historian or sociologist can assign the people he or she is studying to predetermined pigeonholes called *classes*, then all societies are and have been class

societies. But in the historically more important sense of how people actually related to each other and identified themselves in their social order, then eighteenth-century English men and women ordered themselves in a status hierarchy, in terms of vertical rather than horizontal relationships. In other words, individuals formulated their self-identity not through any sense of solidarity with those who shared their economic interests, but rather through their connections with those who stood above and below them in the social order. Each person was thought to have been assigned at birth a position in the natural—indeed, divinely established—social hierarchy. Hence, the social structure was like a ladder, or rather a number of parallel ladders, each rung constituting a status gradation with its own generally accepted duties and privileges. If a person moved up or down the ladder, it was off one rung and onto another; the ladder itself remaining unchanged. Dr. Samuel Johnson, the great wit and man of letters, remarked that the English people were set in their hierarchical places “by the fixed, invariable rules of distinction of rank, which create no jealousy, since they are held to be accidental.” Thus, when the English talked about social position, they spoke in terms of degrees, order, and ranks—gradations of social status, not of economic class.

“Mankind,” Dr. Johnson observed, “are happier in a state of inequality and subordination.” Such was the view unanimously held by those at the top of the hierarchy and ceaselessly preached to those below them. This is not



Mr and Mrs Andrews, by Thomas Gainsborough (1748). This painting reflects the comfortable self-assurance of the English country gentry in the eighteenth century.

surprising because the distance in wealth and prestige from top to bottom was enormous. On the highest rung of the hierarchy stood the titled nobility, consisting of fewer than two hundred families. All the nobles were great landlords who dominated their counties in near-majestic splendor. They lived in palatial country homes, often gigantic edifices of close to one hundred rooms, and enjoyed on average £8,000 a year. A few, like the duke of Bedford and the duke of Devonshire, raked in more than £30,000 a year from rentals alone, the equivalent of many millions of dollars today. Just below the nobility came the ranks of the big landlords—baronets, knights, esquires, and gentlemen—more than fifteen thousand families, each enjoying upward of £1,000 a year and each living in a stately country house. Together, these landlords and their families—the nobility and the gentry—amounted to less than 3 percent of the population, but they enjoyed 15 percent of the national income. All also enjoyed the vitally important title of *gentleman*—a position of honor, to be fought for if necessary, that was assigned to the lucky few born into “good” families and displayed by badges of status such as genteel education, graceful deportment, and conspicuous consumption. Gentle status was defined as the ability to live well without working for a living, or, as the novelist Daniel Defoe put it, gentlemen were “such who live on estates, and without the mechanism of employment.”

In the countryside, below the gentlemen (and ladies) came those who actually worked the land: freeholders, tenant farmers, and farm laborers. *Freeholders* were owner-occupiers, distinguished from the gentry in that they managed their farms themselves. Freeholders still claimed the traditional label of *yeomen*, but this was a dwindling order. Most farms were worked by tenants, some well-off, others struggling, all leasing land from the landlords for cash. Their access to a tenancy and the terms of their leases were normally set by custom, though some landlords simply rented to the highest bidder. Together, the freeholders and farmers of England numbered about 350,000 families, most earning between £40 and £150 a year. They employed large numbers of farm laborers and domestic servants, who were themselves ranked in distinct hierarchies: butlers, footmen, and hallboys; housekeepers, cooks, chambermaids, and scullery girls; husbandmen, gardeners, stable boys, and milkmaids.

Some of the farm laborers and domestics were hired on a yearly basis and *lived in* the farmer's household. Most worked on a daily or seasonal hiring, having offered their labor for sale at a local market. The latter were the *cottagers*, who rented a cottage and a scrap of land on which to grow vegetables, who usually had customary rights to the use of village commons

and waste lands, and who with their wives undertook some craft such as weaving, glove making, or straw plaiting in slack times. In good years, cottagers and their families could scrape together a meager living; in bad years, they had to look to the parish for assistance. The leading statistician of the day made no distinction between cottagers and paupers, four hundred thousand families with an average of only £6 or £7 a year. In rural England, the laborers ranked above only those with no claim on the society at all—vagrants, beggars, thieves, and the like.

The rural laborers formed part of the *laboring poor*, the base of the social hierarchy that comprised almost a quarter of the population. The other segment of the laboring poor lived in the towns. The urban laboring poor, like those in the countryside, were often in need of assistance from the Poor Law (local governmental assistance dating from the Elizabethan era) or private charity; they included vagrants, beggars, criminals, soldiers, sailors, and unskilled male and female workers.

Above the urban laboring poor came the wide range of *the middling sort*, who constituted a dynamic and growing element in English society, amounting to about 15 percent of the English and Welsh population in the early 1700s. The middling sort did not fit neatly into the traditional social hierarchy. At the lower end of the middling scale stood artisans, shopkeepers, tradesmen, and their families, earning perhaps £50 a year. Artisans had their own hierarchies—apprentices, journeymen, and masters—most of whom were male, though women sometimes did become apprentices and learn the trades. Some master artisans owned their own shops and employed apprentices and journeymen. The *London Tradesman* in 1747 listed more than 350 different crafts and trades, not only butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers, but also jewelers, goldsmiths, shipwrights, carpenters, shoemakers, saddlers, harness makers, tailors, lace makers, weavers, cutlers, printers, chain makers, spurriers, gunsmiths, hatters, clockmakers, and all the rest of a world of manufacturing now largely gone.

Above the artisans and shopkeepers in income and standard of living were the merchants and professional people. Rich businessmen could earn anything from hundreds to thousands of pounds a year. Professional men (women could not enter any of the professions until the late nineteenth century) earned a wide range of incomes and improved their status throughout the century. There were only five recognized professions: law, the Church, medicine, the army, and the navy (officer ranks, of course). At the beginning of the century, professional men were regarded, like tradesmen and merchants, as overly ambitious and therefore not genteel. By the end of the cen-

tury, however, they had gained considerable respectability and were even thought of as satellites of the landed orders.

Eighteenth-century society, then, was a finely graded hierarchy in which status distinctions were carefully defined, observed, and protected. Yet England was not a caste society. Although there was little movement at the top level, the *titled aristocracy*, none of the rungs on the social ladder was legally closed to outsiders. Landowners enjoyed privileges, but the privileges defined by the law were surprisingly few: the titled nobility sat in the House of Lords and were entitled to trial by their peers; otherwise, nobility and gentry were subject to the same body of law as everyone else and theoretically opened their ranks to newcomers.

These concessions composed the social price that the landowners paid for the preeminence they won in 1688. In eighteenth-century England, property determined status, and property could be purchased. In medieval society, property followed status, but this rule had now been reversed. It was possible for a person to acquire a fortune, buy property, and move up to the appropriate rung on the social ladder. At the same time, it was possible for a family to squander its fortune and its estates and thus to find itself reduced in status. Rich businessmen tried to marry daughters of the gentry to acquire status; younger sons of landed families often had to marry mercantile wealth or to find positions in the professions. In sum, there were opportunities for social mobility, up and down, in eighteenth-century England.

There was also an often unseemly scramble as people jostled for positions in the social hierarchy. Barons sought to become earls, squires to become knights, farmers to become squires, merchants to become gentlemen, and shopkeepers to become merchants. Money was the key, and Englishmen impressed foreigners with their love of money. The most significant aspect of the upward scramble was for wealthy merchants and financiers to buy estates and so cross the all-important line into gentle status. The society was full of men who had achieved privileged status, such as Sir George Dashwood, a London brewer; Sir Josiah Child, a banker; and Sir George Wombwell, a merchant of the East India Company. The most famous example was Thomas (“Diamond”) Pitt, the son of an Anglican clergyman who became a sea captain, an *interloper* in the trade of the East India Company (interlopers violated a trading company’s monopoly on commercial transactions), and finally a merchant and governor in the Company itself. A poacher turned gamekeeper. Pitt made so much money in the Indian trade that he was eventually able to buy more than ten estates in England and set himself up as a member of Parliament. (He also brought home from India a

diamond of 410 carats, which he later sold for £135,000.) Such businessmen usually lacked the social graces to be fully accepted by landed society, but one or two generations later the family passed as the genuine article. As Defoe put it, “After a generation or two, the tradesmen’s children, or at least their grandchildren, come to be as good gentlemen, statesmen, parliament men . . . bishops and noblemen as those of the highest and most ancient families.”

The upward and downward flow of people did not destroy the status hierarchy, but rather preserved it. Each person and family assumed the style, the duties, and the privileges of their new position as they moved up the rungs. Limited social mobility thus provided a safety valve for the economic dynamism of the country. It marked off England as very different from Wales, Ireland, and even Scotland, where the social hierarchies were comparatively frozen. In England, as long as everyone recognized and accepted the hierarchy itself and behaved according to the prescribed forms and standards at each level, then the structure itself was stable.

SOCIAL RELATIONS: PROPERTY, PATRONAGE, AND DEFERENCE

Property was one of the pillars of eighteenth-century society because it provided a person or family with the means of survival, because it formed the basis of power, and most of all because it determined social status. “The great and chief end . . . of men uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government,” John Locke had written, “is the preservation of their property.” The central features of social relationships were closely related to property: *patronage* and *deference*. Property enabled a person to disburse patronage—gifts, jobs, appointments, contracts, favors—and the ability to act as a patron was the crucial measure of property and status. To be a great man or lady was to be able to dispense patronage to clients, called in that day one’s *friends* or *interest*. From the recipient’s point of view, to have a niche in life—a means of survival and advancement—required being within the circle of some patron’s friends. According to essayist Joseph Addison, “To an honest mind the best perquisites of place are the advantages it gives a man of doing good”; by “doing good” he meant being helpful to one’s friends.

In eighteenth-century England patronage played the role that merit and achievement play in modern democratic societies. Almost all government offices, clerical (that is, church) appointments, tenancies on landed estates, jobs for laborers, apprenticeships for boys, commissions for artists and

architects, assignments for writers, military and naval posts, and the vast array of positions in domestic service were distributed by patronage. No one took entrance or civil service exams or had to show certificates of qualification. Furthermore, few looked on patronage as corruption, for it was simply the way that the political, economic, and social systems worked. Nor did English men and women believe that seeking help from a patron was degrading or that receiving such help was unfair. As Sir Robert Walpole, great landowner and politician, declared, “nothing was more reasonable, or more just” than the use of a man’s position “to serve his friends and relations.”

In return for their patronage, patrons demanded deference, which included postures of gratitude, loyalty, service, and obedience. If a man felt entitled to claim assistance from his superior, he also felt it right to defer to that patron’s opinions and wishes. Laborers were expected to move aside and pull their forelocks when the landlord or members of his family rode by, tenant farmers to vote the way the landowner wished, sons and daughters to defer to their parents, artists to render their patrons (or even their patrons’ prize animals) beautiful in portraits, and clergymen to preach on the lines preferred by their patrons. Deference was not regarded as servile, but as honorable. As one late seventeenth-century guide for husbandmen put it, “A just fear and respect he must have for his landlord, or the gentleman his neighbour, because God hath placed them above him, and he hath learnt [in the Fifth Commandment] that by the father he ought to honour is meant all his superiors.”

There were plenty of occasions, as we will see, when deference broke down in the eighteenth century, for people, even the common folk, also had a strong sense of traditional rights and privileges, and sometimes this sense of rights clashed with that of obligations. Nevertheless, patronage and deference, more than force, held the society together. Face-to-face relationships up and down the social hierarchy connected people to each other. These personal relationships were not, however, necessarily loving or friendly. The patron could be unfair or abusive, and the connection between patron and client was always unequal. Exploitation, then, was an inevitable feature of such an inegalitarian society.

The face-to-face relationships could exist only because the “scale of life,” as Professor Harold Perkin called it, was small. As late as 1760, 75 to 80 percent of the 6.5 million people in England lived in villages or small towns. It remained true that few people outside the elite ever traveled beyond the parish or the nearest market town. Few people ever saw more than several hundred others gathered at one time—church services, markets, fairs, and

traditional celebrations at the manor house being the main occasions. Each of these moments reinforced the local community. In rural England, everyone knew everyone else. Even the units of production were small. The greatest noble households may have numbered a hundred servants and laborers, but most farm households were much smaller. Even in the towns, most work was done in households by the master or journeyman, his wife and family, and his apprentices and laborers. A large shop consisted of fifteen to twenty people. Peter Laslett wrote: "Time was when the whole of life went forward in the family, in a circle of loved, familiar faces, known and fondled objects all to human size."¹ This observation perhaps sentimentalizes the small scale of life, but it highlights the very different quality of human relationships in preindustrial England from those in the modern world.

LAND, MARRIAGE, PATRIARCHY, AND THE FAMILY

Landed property was the foundation of the social hierarchy. Land produced much of the nation's wealth and gave employment to most of the laboring force. Land was the source of prestige and therefore the key to status. To own an estate placed a man at the top of the social ladder and gave him political power. But the size of estates grew throughout the century, and the number of estates was small; hence, land was expensive and increasingly so during the eighteenth century. Two features of the society followed from these facts: (1) there was severe competition among the wealthy to buy (or to add to) estates and (2) the object of all landowners was to keep their estates intact.

The landowners used several devices for these purposes. The first was the principle of *primogeniture*, or inheritance of the property by the eldest son. Younger sons and daughters might be given a lump sum of money or an annuity, but the estate as a whole passed to the eldest son, or in the absence of a son, to the designated heir. Landowners did everything possible to avoid and prevent sale of an estate or parts of it. Primogeniture was largely a matter of custom and operated in law only when a property owner died without a will, which no competent landowner would ever allow to happen. Hence, the most important device for ensuring the passage of an estate intact was the *strict settlement*. These settlements, wills carefully drawn up and defended by the law, provided that each inheritor got the land under

¹Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*, 21.

severe restriction: he must not alienate (sell) any of it; it was thus *entailed*. By the principle of entailment, therefore, strict settlements turned the owner of an estate into a sort of life tenant. A squire might settle his land on his son, but on legal condition that the son in turn pass the estate to the grandson. And the son, by powerful social custom, resettled the estate on his son by making the same sort of will, and so on down the generations.

This desire to keep estates intact had heavy consequences for other sons in the family and for all daughters. Because only the eldest son would inherit, different means of support had to be found for all the other offspring. Here is where patronage came into play. With proper connections, younger sons could be sent into *the professions*—the law, Church, army, navy, or medicine. Entry into business was much less favored because work of a self-interested sort was thought to be tainted by trade and therefore to some degree dishonorable and thus ungentlemanly. But no landlord opposed money itself; the typical landlord would be delighted if his sons married wealthy heiresses, regardless of the source of their fortunes. Marriage to a rich banker's or merchant's daughter might provide a financial base for a second or third son to launch an effort to buy an estate. The flow downward of non-inheriting sons into the professions and upward of mercantile daughters into landed society helped bond landed and commercial wealth.

Daughters were a major problem for landowning families. Women could own landed property—and a significant number (mainly widows) did—but the custom in landed families was to keep the estates in men's hands. Thus, to find and secure suitable marriages for their daughters was a matter of ceaseless calculating and campaigning for the landowner and his wife. To make her attractive on the marriage market, a landowner customarily bestowed a dowry on his daughter at the time of her marriage. These dowries might amount to thousands of pounds, and everyone thought it perfectly proper if the prospective groom (or rather his family) bargained to get the dowry increased. Thus, having a bevy of daughters was a serious drain on a family's resources and was regarded by most landlords as at best a mixed blessing.

These circumstances made marriage arrangements within the landowning orders a matter of delicate negotiations and bargaining between families, not unlike diplomatic negotiations between countries. Family fortunes and the status of the lineage were at stake, so parents played a major role in choosing partners for their children. The precise weight assumed by parental opinion varied from family to family, depending on the particular



Marriage à-la-Mode, by William Hogarth (1743). Here the great satirical English painter depicts mercenary negotiations held by the heads of two wealthy families and their lawyers while the prospective bride and groom wait, unconsulted, at the side.

mix of personalities involved. Moreover, the balance between parental choice and the young person's preference was shifting during the century, as individualism, reason, and eventually romantic sensibility grew in cultural importance. As the decades passed, young people expected to play a bigger role in their own matchmaking and the parents a lesser role. In the seventeenth century, the parents largely arranged the marriages; in the eighteenth century, their role slowly moved toward one of exercising a veto over their children's choices.

Nowhere are these familial tensions better illustrated than in Henry Fielding's great comic novel, *Tom Jones*. In it, the dashing, handsome Tom and the lovely, maidenly Sophia Western love each other. Alas, Tom is illegitimate and thus an unsuitable match for Sophia, whose aunt expresses to her the traditional view:

So far, madam, from your being concerned alone [in your marriage], your concern is the least, or surely the least important. It is the honor of your family which is concerned in this alliance; you are only the instrument. . . . The alliance between the families is the principal matter.

But Mr. Allworthy, Tom's excellent guardian, has a more modern view: young people should marry if they love one another, provided that their families are consulted and have the right of refusal. This is also Sophia's position and clearly that of Fielding: Sophia vows never to marry without her father's consent, but she also refuses to marry *his* choice (in this case, the sniveling Mr. Blifil) because she does not love him.

Such issues reached to the heart of marriage and family life themselves. What was the nature of the relationship between husband and wife, or between parents and children, in eighteenth-century England? The surviving evidence sheds most light on the families of the landowners and the well-to-do people of the middling sorts. English law was clear: upon marriage, the wife lost legal personhood. As the famous legal philosopher Sir William Blackstone put it, "In marriage husband and wife are one person and that person is the husband." The wife did not own property or sign contracts; she could not sue or be sued; she could not serve on juries. In the gentry and aristocracy, a woman was supposed to be under the care (and the control) of a man all her life: first her father, then her husband.

But here, too, actual behavior was changing. Family life, like the social structure itself, had long been authoritarian and patriarchal. In the seventeenth century, Puritanism had accentuated patriarchal control in the family and had intensified the parental desire to subordinate the will of the children to their own, as well as to close the nuclear family to the claims of the lineage as a whole. That peculiar Puritan intensity tended to diminish during the eighteenth century. The reasonableness and tolerance advocated in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century thought mitigated some of the harsh intensity of the Puritan-style family and led to more companionable relations between husbands and wives, as well as to more affectionate concern by parents for their children. For this reason, toys and children's books emphasizing fun and pleasure became important consumer items for the first time in the eighteenth century. Of course, not all English families were warm and affectionate. Among the wealthiest landed families, the great fortunes still allowed parents to neglect their children. In the eighteenth century, the English custom emerged of sending the children away to school as early as possible. For example, Robert Walpole, who was later to become prime minister, was sent away at age six to boarding schools and later to Cambridge; he returned only at age twenty-two, rarely having spent more than a few weeks at home.

At the other end of the social scale, poverty ensured that parental attitudes toward children varied widely, with the harsh struggle for survival

sometimes sapping family affections. Young men and women among the lowest levels of the laboring poor could marry without fearing that their parents would punish them through disinheritance (because there was no property to be inherited), but they also found all too often that they could not feed all the children they produced. Although marriage among the laboring poor did not entail the diplomatic negotiations characteristic of the rich, it was nevertheless a calculated decision. Within the ranks of the laboring poor, marriage was preeminently a practical matter. Most work in eighteenth-century England went on in households, and the family functioned as an economic unit. “Dogged determination,” as one historian has called it, often characterized the relationship of husband and wife. Divorce, legally possible only by private act of Parliament, was available only to the ruling elite, but the practice of *wife sale*, a ritualized form of ending a marriage in which a man took his wife to a fair and sold her by prearrangement, sometimes occurred in rural areas. Desertion was appallingly common.

The decision of a couple to marry depended on their ability to set up a household and make a living. The number of opportunities to do so was growing slowly, but the society was relatively stingy in the niches it made available. Young men had to finish apprenticeships or wait for a cottage or tenancy to open up; young women often had to spend time in domestic service or as a farm girl. Thus, the average age at marriage was relatively high—about twenty-seven years for men and twenty-five for women—and marriages lasted for a comparatively short time. On average, each couple had five children, but only three survived to age twenty. Large families were rare, and extended families (with more than one generation of adults living together under the same roof) were even more unusual.

Life was difficult and brief, and death and pain were constant presences. No census was taken until 1801, but surviving records make it clear that life expectancy was short, perhaps thirty-five years. Medical care that helped rather than harmed its recipients was practically nonexistent. Neither villages nor cities had any sewerage system except open gutters; refuse was dumped into the streets to rot and pollute water supplies. The stench was staggering and the health hazards grim. Diseases such as smallpox, typhus, and influenza repeatedly swept through the population. The poor had no defenses against the cold and damp of winter. One physician watched the poor in his district die from an epidemic in 1727: “Nor did any other method which art could afford relieve them; insomuch that many of the little country towns and villages were almost stripped of their poor people.” Women frequently died while giving birth, and infant mortality was especially high:

about one-fifth of all babies died before they were one year old. Children in both rural and urban households were put to work very early, perhaps at six or seven years, scaring crows and picking rocks from the fields or helping with carding and spinning. Boys and girls between eleven and fourteen years old received training by formal and informal apprenticeship in the work that would occupy them the rest of their lives.

THE COMMERCIAL REVOLUTION

At the start of the eighteenth century, agriculture remained the largest industry in England: the income of landlords and tenants alone composed half of the national income, and farming directly or indirectly employed more than half of the English people. Commerce, however, composed the real growth sector of the English economy. Dr. Johnson observed: "There never was from earliest ages a time in which trade so much engaged the attention of mankind, or commercial gain was sought with such general emulation." This was an age of *commercial capitalism*, for capitalist practices (investment of money in commercial enterprises for the purpose of increasing profits) had emerged in the 1600s, a century before industrialization began. The middling sort provided a substantial number of men with the commercial skills to direct the expansion of trade and take the necessary risks. As the historian Roy Porter wrote, "England teemed with practical men of enterprise, weather-eye open, from tycoons to humble master craftsmen."²

The state did not plan or direct the economy; individual initiative rather than government fiat established the mercantile houses, banks, shipping firms, turnpike trusts, woolens companies, and countless shops that sprung up across the country. The state did, however, play an active role in English commercial expansion: it responded to the needs of powerful commercial interests by protecting domestic manufacturing with tariffs and other regulations, promoting and securing foreign trade (by war if necessary), chartering exclusive commercial and financial companies, and avoiding both the heavy taxation and the internal tariffs that would have dampened trade.

Commercial expansion both generated and was generated by domestic consumption and foreign trade. England enjoyed what has been called a *consumer revolution* during the eighteenth century. Landlords, tenant farmers, and people of the middling sort all indulged their desire for luxury,

²Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 95.

fashion, and convenience by consuming goods of all kinds. Shops providing consumer goods sprang up in even the small cities and towns. Not only did the landlords build, reconstruct, and redecorate their great houses with marvelous furniture and objects of art, but also professional and other middling sorts with less ostentatious wealth enjoyed consumer products such as textiles, tablecloths, china services, pottery, cutlery, ceramics, prints, books, and newspapers to a degree that was entirely new in any European society. Refinement of manners usually accompanied the goods. Some aristocrats became anxious about the consumer pretensions of their social inferiors, and many traditional moralists denounced society's growing taste for luxury. But the desire for consumer goods could not be quashed, for the intent of the landlords to impress each other and overawe those below them in the hierarchy only inspired the desire among the less wealthy to emulate them.

Foreign trade continued to grow in all its branches—exports, imports, and reexports. The new trades, such as the importing and reexporting of tobacco, sugar, linens, calicoes, and slaves, grew steadily relative to the old staple export, finished woollens. The basic pattern of English trade was shifting, for although the proportion of English imports from northern Europe still stood at over 30 percent in 1750, the English gradually imported less from Europe and more from the East Indies, the West Indies, and North America. Similarly, exports and reexports to Europe (especially to Spain and Portugal) remained of great importance, but shipping to North America and the East Indies won a larger share. Overall, English overseas trade doubled between 1700 and 1760, accelerating from a growth rate of about 1 percent a year in 1700 to 2 percent a year in 1760—a remarkable performance for a preindustrial society. This foreign trade, as well as the coastal trade in coal and foodstuffs, made shipping a formidable business. In the 1740s, for instance, more than two hundred ships (most of them English) worked the tobacco trade alone. Because of the Navigation Acts, more than 80 percent of all ships calling at British ports were British owned; British shipping tonnage more than doubled between 1700 and 1770.

London continued to be the largest port by far and to grow in size—to more than seven hundred thousand people in 1760, probably a quarter of whom worked in the port trades. London's insatiable consumer demand drew in goods from most of the British Isles: cattle from Wales and Scotland; fruits and vegetables from the Thames Valley and the West Country; grains from the Midlands and East Anglia; coal from Newcastle; and iron from Sussex, the western Midlands, and eastern Wales. Yet London's *share*

of England's expanding trade declined as provincial wealth grew. The new trades also stimulated the expansion of other cities, Liverpool, Bristol, and Glasgow in particular. Liverpool, the center of the slave trade, grew from about five thousand people in 1700 to thirty thousand in 1750. London, then, should be seen as the hub of an internal market that incorporated most of the regions of England, as well as parts of Ireland, Wales, and Scotland. London's financial institutions grew in size and number, as ambitious entrepreneurs scrambled to service and profit from England's soaring national debt. A craze for joint-stock companies and speculation in their stock soared until 1720, when the South Sea Company's inflated stock collapsed. Thereafter, laws severely restricted joint-stock company foundation, but the commercial sector found its own ways of raising capital and facilitating transactions, as private merchants and attorneys in growing numbers performed banking functions. In addition, the formation of private turnpike trusts began to improve England's notoriously poor roads by financing their construction and maintenance through tolls. Water transport—slower but cheaper than road haulage—improved as well, again by private efforts that added to the mileage of navigable rivers and began in the 1750s to construct a system of canals.

To get a sense of commercial development in the first half of the century, one can look at the example of Abraham Dent, who ran a general store in the small town of Kirkby-Stephen in Westmorland. In the 1750s and 1760s, Dent sold a remarkable variety of items to customers from the town and nearby villages: tea, sugar, wine, beer, cider, barley, soap, candles, tobacco, lemons, vinegar, silk, cottons, woolens, needles, pins, books, magazines, paper, ink, and a great many other goods as well. His supplies came from a surprisingly wide area, including Halifax, Leeds, and Manchester in the North; Newcastle in the Northeast; Coventry in the Midlands; and Norwich and London in the East. He financed his operation in a sophisticated way: by handling bills of exchange (versions of our modern-day checks) and by extending credit to his customers and receiving it from his suppliers. He bought stockings knitted locally for retail to his customers and soon was having thousands made on order. Increasingly, then, he became a small capitalist, ordering goods made to sell to large-scale buyers, usually wholesalers in London. Almost inevitably, as he dealt in more complex financial transactions, Dent became a banker. Not all shopkeepers were as successful as Abraham Dent, but his case illustrates the integration of the market economy and the growing connections between commerce and industry.

MANUFACTURING BEFORE THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

As commerce flourished and the average Englishman's love of cash and profits intensified, entrepreneurs looked for more efficient ways to produce the goods that English consumers wanted. The eighteenth century was the heyday of the *domestic* or *putting-out* system. By this system, manufacturing remained decentralized, located in the cottages of hundreds of villages and small towns. It was not yet mechanized, as it would become during industrialization, but it was highly commercialized. An individual capitalist, often a merchant like Abraham Dent, bought raw materials and supplied them to the village craftspersons or to farm families, paying each a piece rate (a set amount per piece) for his or her work in finishing the product; then the capitalist collected and sold the product himself. Such was the mode of production in woolens, the metal trades, nailmaking, watchmaking, leather goods, and many others. Throughout the English countryside, many farm families supplemented their incomes by doing one of the steps in the production process. Other families found that poor soil in their locality or the increasing demand for textiles or other manufactured goods drew them, and their whole villages, into full-time manufacturing. In these areas, such as the Northwest or the Pennines, the laborers left their work to help in the fields only at harvest time. This system was of great advantage to the capitalist, whose investment was limited to raw materials. Further, when demand declined, the supplier reduced production simply by laying off workers; none of his own machines or tools stood idle. Finally, the system left problems of labor relations and work discipline to the laborers themselves.

The domestic system provided no golden age for its laborers, however. True, the nailers, weavers, and other craftsmen and craftswomen worked in their own cottages, alongside their families, and usually on machines they had purchased themselves. In many instances, there was a strong pride in independence that was later to be remembered with powerful longing. Many, however, went into debt to buy their looms or other tools and in effect had nothing to sell but their labor. The domestic workers were able to control the rhythm of labor themselves—typically slow early in the week and rapid toward the end—but they worked very long hours and were subject to abrupt layoffs as the market demanded. Many habitually were indebted to the master; in other words, although the domestic worker may have been an independent artisan, he (or she) had to struggle to maintain that independence. Most domestic workers depended as heavily on the merchant capitalist as the tenant or farm laborer depended on the landlord.

In much domestic industry, women worked alongside their husbands, whether in preparing the raw materials or in polishing or waxing the finished products. Artisanal households were different: although male craftsmen such as shoemakers and carpenters needed their wives to produce income, they liked to keep their shops separate from the homes and to keep women out of them. There was a culture of male solidarity born during their years of preparing as apprentices and journeymen and maintained by male bonding in alehouses and in craft guilds. In such families, wives generally were relegated to traditionally female occupations such as needlework, laundry work, and street selling.

Work, however, was unrelenting for all because the family economy required each member to contribute. Employment was seasonal and casual for most people, pay for women amounted to only about half that for men, and life was too precarious to enable any but the very lucky to accrue savings. Thus, a slump in demand, a poor harvest, or the death of a husband usually threw families onto the meager mercy of the Poor Law. A product of paternalism, the Poor Law dated to 1662. By this statute, every pauper in England had a right to economic assistance from his or her parish of birth or residence. Funded by *ratepayers* (those who paid the local property tax), this assistance could come either through admission to a poorhouse or in the form of *outdoor relief* (money, food, or clothing given to a person outside a workhouse). About 20 percent of the population was in receipt of poor relief at any one time, the great majority of them women and children.

THE CHANGING AGRICULTURAL ORDER

The bustling aggressiveness of England's towns and commercial economy may at first seem to contrast sharply with the stately calm of English agriculture. Yet in the countryside, too, commercialism was rapidly transforming not only the techniques of production but also the relationships between people. Like a fast-running stream carving its way down a hillside, so commercialism eroded the seemingly timeless features of the English countryside.

English agriculture had been changing at least since the sixteenth century as estates were integrated into the market economy. Landlords enjoyed luxurious consumption and the requisite making of money just as much as the merchant or banker, and they increasingly saw agricultural innovation as the way to earn the money necessary for the Augustan style of life. Highly responsive to the needs of landlords, Parliament after 1688 put no obstacles

in the path of increased farm profits. It clarified the rights of private property, paid a bounty for the export of grain until 1750, and most important of all, facilitated the process of *enclosure*.

At its core, enclosure constituted a massive reorganization of landholding and an overwhelming attack against the traditional agricultural order. Four features characterized this traditional order: (1) the three-field or open-field system, (2) cooperative management, (3) common rights, and (4) relatively low yields. Traditional estates normally included a manor house and one or more villages, surrounded by several kinds of fields, including the home farm, near the manor house, farmed directly by the landlord's steward; the large unfenced (open) fields divided into strips; and the common land (the *commons* or *wastes*). Each of the large fields was allowed to lie fallow every third year so that it could restore itself naturally; therefore, an estate typically had one-third of the fields in wheat, one-third in barley, and one-third in natural grasses. Small owners and tenant farmers held strips in each—the number depending on the size of the ownership or tenancy—and with hired laborers went out daily from the village to work their strips. Because not all small owners and tenants could afford an expensive plow team, plowing usually had to be cooperative, as did certain seasonal activities such as haymaking and harvesting. Moreover, by custom, tenants and cottagers had certain rights to the common land: to pick up fallen branches or to cut peat for fuel, to turn a few pigs and geese onto the common to forage, to graze cows and sheep, or to dig clay for making bricks. Such rights often shifted the balance from starvation to survival for cottagers and their families. The traditional system as a whole, however, was inefficient. Not only did millions of acres lie fallow each year, but also tenants and laborers had to slog long distances from strip to strip. One Buckinghamshire farmer, for example, held two and a half acres, which were divided into twenty-four strips scattered among different fields.

Beginning in some areas as early as the sixteenth century, profit-oriented and efficiency-minded landlords sought to dismantle this traditional agricultural order through enclosure—consolidating and fencing open fields and common land, as well as bringing wastes (woods, bogs, fens, and the like) under cultivation or pasturage. Parishes with only a small number of owners could often agree to end open-field farming, but where there was opposition to enclosing the land, the proponents of enclosure had to resort to private acts of Parliament. All it took, however, was for the owners of a substantial majority of the acreage in the parish—often



The Warrener, by George Morland. In this drawing we have a glimpse of the rural laboring poor—in this case a rabbit hunter and his family.

a small minority of the owners concerned—to petition Parliament for an enclosure act. Parliament routinely passed these acts, usually with no real opportunity for opposition. An enclosure act nullified all existing leases and customary arrangements in the parish and named several commissioners (usually agents of the big owners) to survey the land and to divide it up as compact farms among proprietors with *documented* claims. Proprietors were then required to erect fences or hedges around their new properties.

Enclosure thus created the emblematic and aesthetically pleasing English rural landscape with its neat, compact farms demarcated by well-tended hedges and stone fences. Its social impact was far more ambivalent. Large landowners benefited greatly. Enclosed farms were more efficient than open-field property. Rents went up by about 13 percent overall; thus, expensive as it was, enclosure probably brought big proprietors a return of 20 percent or more on their investment. It liberated the agricultural entrepreneur from the restrictions of tradition and contributed to the aggregate increase of agricultural output and income during the eighteenth century.

Not everyone, however, shared in the profits. Small owners generally had a much harder time than did the large landowners. Although a few of the more aggressive small owners seized the opportunity to farm more efficiently, most had to mortgage their land to pay their share of enclosure costs, and many ended up selling out to their rich neighbors. Many thousands of small owner-occupiers, as well as small tenant farmers, were reduced to day laborer status.

Many cottagers, moreover, could not document their claims to use common land; they had only a customary right and so they received nothing. Not only did they find that enclosure prevented them from tilling particular plots of land that they and their ancestors had worked from time immemorial, but also they lost the communal arrangements of the open-field system and the cherished use rights to common and waste land. The abolition of the commons destroyed one of the main sources of independence for the small holder or cottager. As one observer said in 1780, "Strip the small farms of the benefit of the commons, and they are all at one stroke leveled to the ground." A clergyman in Berkshire said that by enclosure "an amazing number of people have been reduced from a comfortable state of partial independence to the precarious condition of mere hirelings."

Enclosure accelerated the tendency in English agriculture toward concentration of ownership into a relatively few hands, with the actual work of farming being done by substantial tenants who hired landless laborers on a wage basis. Put more abstractly, enclosure stands as the symbol of the gains and losses that occurred as the *cash nexus*—the depersonalized connection between boss and worker—elevated cash and contract over custom and personal relations. In traditional English society, everyone except the very poorest had a place in the hierarchical social order, with privileges and duties attached. Face-to-face relations meant that most people lived their lives amid known, although certainly not always loved, faces. Paternalism was often abused, but its claims were not easily ignored, and it ensured that members of the elite felt a personal responsibility for those within their circle of clients and dependents. Custom was stultifying for the ambitious man, as it was for many women, but it taught rich and poor, landlord and tenant, farmer and laborer, journeyman and apprentice what their rights and responsibilities were.

During the eighteenth century, however, commercial attitudes slowly altered all these features of an earlier way of life. The commercialization of

English life was not uniform in its effects in every place or in every set of relationships, nor was the transition complete by the end of the century. Nevertheless, the desire for profit and for maximizing the return from every parcel of property unceasingly worked to shift the basis of relationships from customary arrangements to contractual bargains. For some, this shift meant liberation; for others, it was misery. But whether liberating or immiserating, the shift from an old to a new kind of society, from one based on custom to one based on contract, stands out as the main trend in the social history of eighteenth-century England.

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Chapter 4

Political Structure and Politics in Augustan England

In the eighteenth century, England's propertied elite modeled itself on imperial Rome: just as Caesar Augustus had ended a period of civil war and brought peace and expansion to the Roman Empire, so English landowners believed themselves to have ended a century of constitutional and religious strife and sponsored an era of stability and expansion. Strong contrasts, however, characterized the politics of the so-called Augustan Age. Political violence and intense party competition marked the first twenty years of the century, in contrast to the political peace and stability of the middle four decades. Political theory also contrasted with political practice. The ideal of a *mixed constitution* of king, Lords, and Commons—resting on the consent of the governed—diverged from the reality of rule by a narrow oligarchy. By the 1730s, England had become almost a one-party state, its apparent calm resting not so much on the support of a majority of the people as on the economic and social power of the Whig property owners. Moreover, although the English praised individual liberty and cheap government, the eighteenth-century state grew expansive and powerful. Finally, there was a profound contrast between the sedate world of parliamentary maneuvering and the raucous and riotous world of popular politics. These contrasts give a sense of the rich and complex flavor of eighteenth-century English politics.

ACHIEVING POLITICAL STABILITY, 1700–1720

The twenty-five or thirty years after 1688 were an unstable and dangerous period in British politics. As Professor J. H. Plumb wrote, “Governments teetered on the edge of chaos, and party strife was as violent as anything

England had known since the Civil War.”¹ Opposing ideologies as well as personal and family disputes drove Whigs and Tories to clash at both the national and local levels. Hence, the *rage of party* afflicted the first decades of the eighteenth century. General elections were frequent, and the number of constituencies contested in each election was high. Yet by 1750, general elections had become few and far between and electoral contests rare. By then the Tories had been reduced to a small group in permanent opposition, and the Whigs dominated Parliament and alone formed governments. What brought about such a transformation? Institutional changes, the resolution of divisive issues, and certain long-term social trends all contributed to the emergence of this oligarchy and the growth of this peculiar kind of stability.

The growing cost of elections shaped the institutional developments. Although very small by modern standards, the electorate of England and Wales was growing to unprecedented size, with perhaps three hundred thousand voters in 1700. Voters regarded their franchise as a possession from which they were entitled to benefit. Thus, rival candidates in a constituency had to ply the electors with copious servings of food and beer, as well as to patronize local tradesmen. The price of entertainment went up throughout the century: the Grosvenors, for instance, spent £8,500 on food and drink for the electors of Chester in 1784. Candidates also had to pay the fees of election officials and make donations to local charities—town halls, churches, almshouses, and so on. In some boroughs, bribery was a major expense. Voters in Weobly, for example, got £20 apiece from the candidate of their choice. Moreover, because patronage greased the wheels of the social system, candidates were expected to find offices for their supporters.

Soaring expenses led to a widespread desire among the ruling elite to hold down the growth of the electorate, to reduce the number of contested seats, and to cut the frequency of general elections. Many men opted not to stand for Parliament or simply were not wealthy enough to do so. In numerous boroughs, aldermen raised the admission expenses of becoming a freeman of the borough. By 1715, the electorate was distinctly narrower than twenty years before. In addition, Parliament in 1716 passed the Septennial Act, which required general elections only every seven years instead of every three. Consequently, whereas twelve general elections occurred between 1689 and 1715, there were only thirteen between 1715 and 1800.

¹J. H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability in England, 1675–1725* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), 74.



The Polling, by William Hogarth. In this painting, Hogarth gives a clear picture of the somewhat chaotic and public quality of voting in the eighteenth century, complete with bribery and influence.

Another institutional change contributing to stability was the concentration of government patronage. As the number of men who could afford a candidacy dwindled, patronage became increasingly centralized in the hands of the government, as opposed to the court. Largely because of the demands of war and the need to conduct complex foreign relations thereafter, the machinery of the British state grew. The number of government offices increased, particularly in the Treasury and the military services. Tax-collecting posts multiplied especially quickly: in 1714, nearly four hundred men collected salt taxes alone. The government doled out all such jobs as patronage. Robert Walpole, Whig prime minister between 1721 and 1742, used thousands of government appointments to build and maintain a massive structure of government support—and one that perpetuated an oligarchy of the wealthiest families.

Such institutional changes, however, would not have sufficed to reduce political conflict if the political nation had been violently divided on the issues. Before 1715, Whigs and Tories, as we have seen, differed radically on a number of crucial issues such as the legitimacy of and the succession to the Crown, Britain's military role on the Continent, trade policies, and the

proper place of the Church of England. The Tories of the early eighteenth century took as their slogan “Peace and the Church in danger,” and the Whigs countered with “Trade and the Protestant succession.” The intensity of these issues dimmed over time, however. The succession of George I and the Hanoverian line proceeded fairly smoothly. Religious fervor gave way to reasonableness, and property owners lost interest in theological controversy. Under Whig rule, Nonconformists suffered no additional harassment, but neither did they win repeal of the Test Acts: the compromise of occasional conformity (see chapter 2) was restored in 1718 and remained in place. Likewise, war and its attendant taxation disappeared temporarily from the political agenda. The great Whig leader Walpole pursued a pacific foreign policy, with a view to reducing the land tax; indeed, his slogan for all policy was “*quieta non movere*” (freely translated as let sleeping dogs lie).

The Whig and Tory parties continued to exist through the 1760s, but until the last decade of the century, Whigs alone enjoyed the perquisites of power. The Tories’ association with the Jacobite cause contributed to their decline in political importance. The Jacobite threat broke out with drama and danger in 1715, when some Highland chiefs raised the Stuart banner in Scotland (see chapter 6). In the eyes of many Englishmen (and Lowland Scots), these Jacobites sought not only to upset the Revolution Settlement, but also to restore tyranny and Catholicism to Britain. Most Tories remained loyal to the new Hanoverian regime: as one Jacobite put it, the English Tories “are never right hearty for the cause, till they are mellow as they call it, over a bottle or two.” Still, enough Tories retained their sentimental attachment to the Stuarts to allow Walpole to exploit the issue by accusing all Tories of harboring Jacobite sympathies.

Increasingly, the Whigs became the “Court party,” enjoying the ear of the monarch and speaking for the aristocracy, the financiers, and the most aggressive commercial captains. It is hard to determine what the Whigs after 1715 stood for, besides the Glorious Revolution itself, the privileges of the landowning elite, the expansion of trade, and the exploitation of state patronage. The Tories more and more adopted an opposition mentality. Along with some “Country” Whigs, the Tories opposed the corruption attendant on the Whig oligarchy’s wallowing in the spoils of politics. They contended that Walpole’s corrupt use of patronage subjugated the House of Commons to the executive and so upset the constitutional balance among king, Lords, and Commons established in 1688. Yet most of the Tories and

Country Whigs did not oppose the principle of patronage, but only what they regarded as the abuse of it. On the whole, the interests of all property owners, Whig and Tory alike, in eighteenth-century England were similar enough to dull the edge of political divisions. In the end, the prosperity, security, and self-interest of the propertied elite—and above all, of the landowners—brought political stability to England.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE LAW IN THE AGE OF OLIGARCHY

The landed oligarchy's power was firmly based in local government. Landlords in the counties and propertied men of commerce in the towns ruled without much control from either the central government above them or usually from the populace below them. These men, after all, had won their struggle with the Crown about who would rule in the localities. The power they exercised was of great importance, partly because it was bound up with the structure of social authority and partly because, other than paying taxes, most people had direct contact with government and law *only* on the local level unless they were taken into the armed services. Unlike those in an absolutist state, the functions of the national government in Britain were severely limited: maintenance of law and order; conduct of foreign affairs in war and peace; protection of the rights of property; and a minimum of economic control, the most important aspect of which was taxation. At the local level, the nation ruled itself, in the sense that the “natural leaders” of society, acting as local officials, ruled the country—enforcing the laws, repairing the roads, caring for the poor, regulating fairs and markets, maintaining churches, and the like.

The institutions of local government composed a patchwork quilt sewn from swatches of historical accident, many of them reaching back to medieval times. But the presence of local autonomy, the variety of local governing institutions, and the rowdiness of the age did not mean that England was an ungoverned or frontier society. The social homogeneity of local officials created a coherent and effective system. All local officials were men of property, not elected but self-perpetuating by means of co-optation. Men in positions of local power selected others for county and parish offices. This social solidarity was buttressed by the face-to-face relations of rural and small-town England (see chapter 3). Except in the big cities—and above all in London, where anonymity was a fact of life—and some remote districts, men of property controlled everything.

The basic unit of local government was the parish. In each of England's approximately ten thousand parishes, unpaid amateurs, selected by the substantial property owners of the parish, carried out the work of local government, ranging from collecting the church rates (local taxes to maintain the church's buildings), maintaining the roads, acting as the local policemen (there being no national or even county police force), apprehending criminals, and relieving paupers.

The work of these parish officers was supervised by the justices of the peace (JPs), who were by far the key figures in eighteenth-century English local government. Appointed by the county's lord lieutenant (usually the greatest nobleman of the county), the JP was a member of the gentry whose estate was worth at least £100 per year. To serve as JP was a heavy and expensive responsibility, but also one of great social prestige. These unpaid officials held broad executive and judicial powers. A single JP exercised summary justice over petty criminals: the power to arrest, try, and punish drunks, game poachers, gamblers, and any other threat to the social order. In Quarter Sessions, a county's JPs together tried all criminal cases below capital crimes and administered the growing burden of laws put on their shoulders by Parliament—laws governing wages and prices (more and more ignored), roads, bridges, jails, and licensing of tradesmen, to name only a few. Britain, then, unlike many Continental countries, was ruled not by royal agents sent from the capital to the provinces, but by volunteers from the landed orders, whose social and economic roots lay in the districts they governed.

The boroughs were as oligarchical as the counties. In most of them, the ruling corporation consisted of a mayor, a dozen aldermen, and two or three dozen councilmen. In a few boroughs, these officials were elected by the *freemen* (men who possessed a certain level of property); such elections were hotly disputed. In most boroughs, however, the aldermen and councilors selected themselves by co-optation—that is, they chose their own members. In any case, power increasingly flowed to the relatively small number of *ex officio* JPs, who had the same powers as their rural brethren.

In the eighteenth century, the rule of law was already England's pride and joy, and it remains so to this day. Nevertheless, the oligarchy managed to make the law work for itself. The penal code became increasingly severe over time and, most strikingly, laws protecting property became more obtrusive. Picking pockets of more than one shilling and shoplifting items worth five shillings both became capital crimes, as did destroying turnpike gates, forgery, or theft from a master by a servant. In 1689, there were fifty

capital crimes on the books; in 1800, there were more than two hundred—and most people were hanged for theft, not murder. Frequent executions, staged as public events, reinforced the oligarchy's power.

One example, eloquently described by the historian E. P. Thompson, illustrates these legal developments. In about 1720, in the Windsor Forest area on the border of Hampshire and Berkshire, new landlords were eager to exploit the economic opportunities of the Forest more efficiently. Unfortunately, their lust for money clashed with the customary *use rights* of the forest's common people. These small owners, tenants, and laborers could eke out a living only if they supplemented their earnings from farm or craft by taking a deer occasionally, fishing in the streams, collecting *lops and tops* of felled timber, and cutting turf for fuel. Such traditional rights, however, did not square with the landlords' newly established absolute rights of private property. The landlords naturally had the power of both Parliament and king at their disposal, but the Forest people had resources of their own—secrecy, stealth, intimidation, and violence. A ferocious conflict erupted between the rangers and gamekeepers, enthusiastic to carry out the landlords' will, and the Forest commoners, desperate to maintain their traditional means of survival. The landlords turned to the law: the Waltham Black Act, passed in 1723, added about fifty items to the already long list of capital crimes on the books, including such offenses as deer poaching, going about the forest at night with face blacked for disguise, and breaking the dams of landlords' fish ponds. Although exceptionally dramatic—after all, there was only one Waltham Black Act during the eighteenth century—the fight in Windsor Forest revealed the iron fist that lay beneath the lacy gloves of the oligarchy. As the novelist Oliver Goldsmith put it, “Laws grind the poor, and rich men rule the law.”

THE STRUCTURE OF NATIONAL POLITICS, 1715–1760

The purposes of national politics, if limited in range, were of great importance to the propertied elite. Britain was at war with scarcely an interruption between 1689 and 1713; war began again in 1739, and as we will see, went on continually thereafter. The logistical requirements of this so-called Second Hundred Years War raised taxes, increased the national debt, and swelled the state bureaucracy, especially in the revenue departments. The landed oligarchy needed to control this burgeoning state apparatus and limit the negative influence of war-related taxes. Above all, these privileged and propertied few recognized the vital importance of winning through

political influence a share of the succulent outpouring of state patronage: government contracts, military and naval commissions, posts in the civil service or tax-collecting agencies, clerical appointments, sinecures in the court, and many other juicy morsels.

These purposes of politics shaped the way the constitution worked. Theoretically, England had a mixed constitution of king, Lords, and Commons, in which each element checked and balanced the others—the monarchical element checked the aristocratic and democratic, and so on. The king remained the nation's chief executive officer, shorn of many of his former prerogatives, but retaining the right to appoint and dismiss his ministers. No one could serve in the government for long without the confidence of the king. But if those ministers were to carry on the king's government, they had to have the confidence of Parliament as well. Inevitably, eighteenth-century kings often had to struggle to sustain their favorites in office at times when they lacked the support of the House of Commons. Given the power of the Commons after 1688, this was a struggle that in the long run the kings could not win.

The difficulties of the Crown were aggravated by the unfortunate personalities of the first two Hanoverian kings. George I and II both were block-headed German princes (George I spoke very little English), not incompetent, but stubborn, unimaginative, and unattractive. George I (1714–27) was shy and indolent; George II (1727–60) was opinionated but could be bullied. Neither was capable of forging parliamentary alliances; hence, both were dependent on their parliamentary leaders. Moreover, the two royals detested each other. As Horace Walpole dryly observed, "It ran a little in the blood of the family to hate the eldest son." Partly for this reason, George I absented himself from group meetings of his ministers, where he would have had to meet his son, and so inadvertently helped the cabinet system of government to evolve.

"Ministers are the Kings in this country," George II complained; yet in fact, Georgian ministers stood in a constitutionally precarious position. The principle of the collective responsibility of the cabinet to the House of Commons did not yet exist; instead, ministers were responsible as individuals to the Crown. The evolution of the cabinet system was sporadic and unplanned. In the late seventeenth century, a *cabinet council* replaced the privy council as the effective organ of the king's advisers, simply because the privy council had become too large. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the cabinet council, too, proved cumbersome and so monarchs tended to turn to a smaller, secret cabinet. This effective cabinet, consisting of the

five or six key ministers, slowly assumed a corporate identity, meeting in the king's private closet (or *cabinet*). The Hanoverians retained the right to meet with ministers individually, however, and only reluctantly gave up the right of consulting political advisors who were *not* "in the cabinet." The cabinet did not function consistently as a corporate entity until after the end of the eighteenth century.

What drove the kings to deal with a cabinet collectively was their continuing need to have as ministers men who could command a majority in Parliament and, above all, in the House of Commons. Much under the sway of royal influence, the House of Lords rarely presented problems, but the House of Commons was different. The well-disciplined parties of modern times did not yet exist. Hence, ministers did not ride to power readily as the pre-chosen spokesmen of a majority party in the Commons, nor did they, once in office, dictate votes to an organized, obedient party. The House of Commons had 558 members, of whom about 100 were active politicians (all Whigs) seeking ministerial office, plus about 100 to 150 *placemen*, who depended on the court and government for their livelihood, and about 250 *Independents*. The ministers of the day could count on the votes of the placemen, but to make up a majority they had to win the support of sufficient numbers of the active politicians and Independents as well.

Patronage was the means to this end. Not all MPs were vulnerable to political patronage: Tories and Country Whigs loudly opposed its use to build government majorities. But many could be bought by offices and favors—if not for themselves, then for relatives, friends, and other clients. Including military officers, the number of officeholders usually stood at between one-third and one-half of all MPs. Opponents among the active politicians were especially susceptible to influence. Indeed, the normal pattern of parliamentary politics was for some person outside the cabinet to make such a nuisance of himself by his opposition that the ministers of the day would have to find a place for him in the government. This was known as *storming the closet*, a game played to perfection by the two leading politicians of the period, Sir Robert Walpole and William Pitt the Elder.

Outside the House of Commons, members of the landed elite used patronage to win elections for their favorites and even to buy seats in the House of Commons. The power of patronage depended on the curiously variegated nature of the constituencies and the small size of the electorate in many of them. The major categories of constituencies were the *counties* and the *boroughs*. In the fifty-two English and Welsh counties, all males possessing freeholds worth at least forty shillings (£2) a year could vote.

Differences in local and regional landed values meant that county electorates varied from several hundred to over ten thousand. In most cases, aristocratic or leading gentry families dominated county elections.

The borough franchise was even more irregular. In some boroughs, owners of particular houses voted; in others, just the members of the corporation voted. In still others, all ratepayers (males who paid the local tax) voted. In a few boroughs, all male householders held the franchise. As a result, several boroughs had upward of four thousand voters, but more than half had fewer than five hundred; Old Sarum, a parliamentary borough in southwestern England, had three or four. The government could control small boroughs where there were military installations, shipyards, or large concentrations of civilian officials. Wealthy patrons who had the voters “in their pockets” (hence, the term *pocket borough*) controlled many of the other small boroughs.

The essence of the parliamentary game, consequently, was for the king to appoint as ministers men who could win a working majority in the House of Commons by force of personality and by judicious use of *influence* (patronage), and for ambitious members of the opposition to force the government to buy them off. Electoral promises and party platforms—developments of the future—were not factors, though voters usually did demand that their MPs meet their expectations of proper paternalist behavior. Except for some backwoods opposition radicals, MPs all regarded themselves as independent representatives, not as delegates from their constituencies. Men went into politics not to legislate platforms, but to exercise their judgment on issues as they arose, to protect their interests, to win their share of the spoils, and to act out the political dimension of social authority.

WALPOLE AND THE ROBINOCRACY

Sir Robert Walpole (1676–1745) was the consummate master of the oligarchical system. The son of a Norfolk squire and himself the image of the blunt, coarse country gentleman, Walpole was the most brilliant political operator of the century. Short, fat, and red-faced, he exuded rustic power. He liked to munch Norfolk apples during parliamentary debate and to claim that his gamekeeper’s letters took precedence over official dispatches. But he was no backwoods bumpkin. An efficient administrator, a tireless manipulator of patronage, a formidable debater, and a master of national finance, Walpole was most of all a genius in understanding ordinary human motives. He could deftly detect and exploit the weaknesses of royalty and country MPs alike.



Sir Robert Walpole as Ranger of Richmond Park, by John Wootton. Walpole liked to present himself as the rugged English country squire.

Walpole rose to power from a sound basis. As a loyal Whig member of Parliament (MP) from 1700 to 1721, he served in a number of administrative posts that gave him an unmatched understanding of government operations and finance. He won the friendship and influence of the prince of Wales (heir to the throne). His great opportunity came in 1720, with the bursting of the “South Sea bubble.” The South Sea Company had taken over a part of the national debt, on the basis of which it raised huge sums through inflated stock. The company bribed a number of politicians in order to win privileges, and when thousands of investors were ruined by the collapse of its stock, they angrily demanded that *someone* be punished. Walpole had escaped corruption when many national political leaders had discredited themselves; furthermore, he stepped forward with practical measures to restore public credit. Most important, he screened ministers from attack, limited the political damage, and won the gratitude of George I. In 1721 he was made first lord of the Treasury (the top ministerial post) and within a year had made himself in effect prime minister—the first in English history.

Walpole ruled from 1721 to 1742, his domination of court and Parliament earning the epithet of “the Robinocracy” (*Robin* being a nickname for Robert). With the assistance of his brother-in-law, Lord Townshend, an

expert in European affairs, Walpole took control of every aspect of government policy. He systematically rooted out opponents from government departments, the royal household, the army, the navy, and the Church and replaced them with his own supporters, many of them relatives and friends. With painstaking attention to patronage, he molded a dependable majority in the Lords and the Commons alike. The Tory newspaper the *Craftsman* called Walpole's House of Commons a monster "who had above 500 mouths . . . fed on gold and silver." The ease with which Walpole was able to get the king's business done, not to mention his adroit handling of the royal mistresses, made George I dependent on him. When George I died in 1727, many politicians thought that Walpole was finished, but they reckoned without his shrewd human insight. Walpole recognized that the new king depended more on his queen, Caroline of Anspach, than on his mistresses, and Walpole got on famously with Caroline. Walpole influenced George II through her; as he put it, he "took the right sow by the ear."

The king's support enabled Walpole to survive the first crisis of his regime—a furor over an excise tax scheme in 1733. Walpole's policy in general was non-activist: peace, trade, and tax reduction. By his excise plan, which would have extended the existing system of excise taxes (taxes levied on the consumption of certain goods) to wine and tobacco, Walpole hoped to reduce or even end land taxes. Much to his surprise, the proposal caused a great public outcry, for the opposition was able to play on popular resentments of tax collectors as agents of governmental control who threatened every Englishman's liberty. Walpole was forced to withdraw his plan, but because he retained the king's confidence, he remained in office.

Walpole's grip on power slowly loosened, however, after Queen Caroline died in 1737. As a result, he was unable to withstand the opposition during the second crisis of his regime. This arose over his ineffective conduct of war with Spain. For years, the eagerness of English merchants to milk the Spanish Empire and the efforts of the Spanish coast guard in the West Indies to stop them had soured relations between England and Spain. Walpole preferred negotiations to war, but patriotic English merchants and squires thought he was too meek in asserting English interests. In 1739, he reluctantly agreed to their demands: "It is your war," he told the duke of Newcastle, "and I wish you joy of it." As we will see in chapter 7, the conflict with Spain soon merged with a general conflict on the Continent called the War of Austrian Succession, which was to last through 1748. Because he opposed Britain's involvement, Walpole conducted the war effort ineffectually. His

support in the Commons dwindled, as Independents withdrew their support and as holders of place and pensions sensed that a new source of patronage would soon hold office. When he lost control of the committee that decided disputed elections, he saw that the game was up. Despite the king's support, Walpole resigned in 1742.

THE GREAT COMMONER: WILLIAM PITT THE ELDER

Walpole may have fallen in 1742, but his system did not. The government that succeeded Walpole was headed by Henry Pelham, an unprepossessing but efficient House of Commons manager, and his brother, the duke of Newcastle, an eccentric, incredibly wealthy, anxiety-ridden master of patronage. Together, the Pelhams used Walpole's system to hold in harness a fractious ministry until 1754, when Henry Pelham died. In 1746, they even succeeded in neatly buying off their most troublesome critic, a young man of sweeping vision and rhetorical power named William Pitt (1708–78), by appointing him as paymaster general of the forces. Pitt, however, could not be silenced for good. A man of insatiable ambition, Pitt had inherited the uncontrollable temper of his grandfather, “Diamond” Pitt. His moods swung violently from depression and lethargy to demonic energy. In his manic phases, Pitt had the self-assurance and the broad designs of a global statesman. He was also the most brilliant orator of the century, capable of making his listeners believe that they—and England—were walking with destiny. Hailed as “the Great Commoner,” Pitt was not a good political operator, but his grandiose theatricality and inspirational rhetoric gave him power of a different sort—the emotional support of independent MPs and makers of public opinion.

As we will see in chapter 7, Pitt inspired the English to seize world power status. He couched the ruthless pursuit of English commercial interests around the world in terms of the highest principles. He began his political career in 1735 as a member of the opposition, passionately believing that Walpole was corrupting English politics at home and betraying English interests abroad. His first speeches were so threatening that Walpole had him dismissed from his army commission: “We must muzzle this terrible cornet of the horse.” But Pitt was not to be muzzled. In 1739, he spoke for war with Spain: “When trade is at stake, you must defend it or perish. . . . You throw out general terrors of war. Spain knows the consequences of war in America, but she sees England dare not make it.”



William Pitt, First Earl of Chatham, by Richard Brompton (1772). Here Pitt the Elder, who had become a great national hero as a result of his imperial leadership, is shown in noble's robes.

Pitt *would* dare make it, for he pictured England's destiny to be one of commercial empire. Denied office in 1742 and then harnessed by office in 1746, Pitt was relatively quiet when new fighting with the French began in 1755. But his imperial vision and the lure of higher office finally led Pitt into opposition, and his debating power opened the way to the prime ministership. As the duke of Newcastle told the king, no one could rule without Pitt: "No one will have a majority at present, against Mr. Pitt. No man, Sir, will in the present conjecture set his face against Mr. Pitt in the House of Commons."

We will examine in chapter 7 the objectives and the course of the war of 1756–63. The point here is to understand how Pitt operated within the political system. He stormed the closet in grand style by making himself the voice of outraged patriotism among both commercial interests and independent country gentlemen. His argument that England should contain France on the Continent while defeating them overseas spoke to their

prejudices. Eventually Pitt forced his way into office on his own terms. He was a poor parliamentary manipulator, however, and so needed the duke of Newcastle to manage the patronage. Newcastle had the votes of the *Old Corps* of Walpolean Whigs, and Pitt supplied the support of independent country squires—a potent combination that expressed the unity of the ruling oligarchy.

Yet the significance of the king as a factor in the equation showed itself in 1760, when George III succeeded to the throne. George III hated Pitt and dreamed of reigning *above party*. Even the Great Commoner could not retain office without the king's confidence; hence, Pitt resigned and went into opposition. The oligarchical system, which depended on the monarch's compliance, spun into disarray.

POPULAR POLITICS

The excise crisis of 1733 and the surge of patriotism in 1755–57 show that, despite the power of patronage, public opinion had a part to play in the political drama. Parliamentary politicians sometimes tried to drum up popular opinion for their own purposes by patronizing journalists, manipulating the press, or stirring up crowd demonstrations. They found, however, that public opinion was a dangerous weapon, not easily controlled. Both voters and nonvoters typically played active roles in the often lively and boisterous politics of the constituencies. Thus, outside the politics of the elite, outside the maneuverings of Parliament and the great country houses, there existed an alternative structure of politics.

Much of this alternative political world depended on written matter. Literacy in Georgian England was limited to perhaps 50 percent of the adult population (significantly more men than women), and even that figure includes many whose reading ability was elementary. Literacy was, however, significantly higher in urban centers, especially in London, where it may have reached 80 percent. This urban reading public supported an energetic, growing, and highly politicized newspaper, magazine, and pamphlet press. Moreover, improvements in communications such as the turnpike roads and the postal service made widespread distribution of publications possible. By 1760, there were at least twelve newspapers in London and thirty-five in provincial towns. These newspapers, and the accompanying flood of pamphlets and broadsides, were intensively read and debated, most notably in the coffeehouses that enlivened public life in all the cities. In 1740 there were 550 coffeehouses in London and at least

one in each of the larger market towns. Politicians tried to channel this obstreperous press toward their own views and to control it by means of the Stamp Tax, but without much effect. Public opinion as seen in the newspaper and pamphlet press remained staunchly patriotic and oppositional, except for papers such as *Lloyd's Evening Post*, which were controlled by the government.

An even more active role in popular politics was played by crowds. We have seen that demonstrations in London and elsewhere helped force Walpole to withdraw the excise in 1733; similarly, they caused repeal of an act allowing for the naturalization of Jews in 1753. But their targets extended far beyond national issues. Riots occurred over a wide variety of issues: the game laws (which prevented anyone but landlords from hunting), turnpike tolls, efforts by customs officers to stop smugglers, conditions of labor, denial of traditional rights to common land, and high food prices. Benjamin Franklin wrote in 1769: "I have seen, within a year, riots in the country, about coin; riots about elections; riots about workhouses; riots of colliers, riots of weavers, riots of coal-heavers. . . ."

The ruling elite wanted deference and subordination from the public, but insubordination and riot were often what they got. London was the worst afflicted, but the forest regions were also notorious for riotous behavior; riots could break out in any village or town where squire and parson either lacked authority or transgressed the popular sense of just rule. These riots were not blind, aimless protests; still less were they the simple brimming over of energy in a lawless society. Riots in preindustrial England had clear, limited objectives and conformed to a popular consensus about moral principles and acceptable social practice—to a sense of a traditional *moral economy*. Rioters were essentially traditionalists, not revolutionaries, for they ordinarily sought to get the natural leaders of the community—the squire and the JP—to enforce the law and to restore customary practices and standards.

The food riot was the most common form of crowd action. It is easy to see why: a rise in food prices in any locality confronted many families with hunger and destitution. Thus, in 1756–57, there were more than one hundred food riots in thirty counties. The pattern in each of these was the same: rioters intervened in the local market system by intimidation or violence to restore what they regarded as a just price. They got JPs to enforce a just price for wheat or to prevent the export of foodstuffs from the region, they forced bakers to reduce the price of bread, or they evicted middlemen from the market. In 1757, for instance,

[laborers in a small town in Yorkshire] forcibly rung the Corn [wheat] Bell, and their Ringleader proclaimed the Price of Corn . . . ; which done, they seized the Sacks of the Farmers, and insisted upon having the Corn at the Price by them set, some of them paying, and others taking it without paying any Thing. Others of the Rioters set the price on Oatmeal, Potatoes, etc.

The outcome of this riot was typical in that the rioters succeeded. The magistrates could, of course, call in the army to put down any riot, but they did not like to do so. The gentleman JPs did not want to show their weakness by calling in outside forces, for that would have destroyed the aura of their social authority. The rioters normally were appealing to the local officials' sense of paternalist duties, which was in everyone's interest to maintain. Thus, the governing authority at the local level was exercised by the established landed rulers, but was ultimately subject to the consent of the populace. Ordinary people deferred to and obeyed the propertied, but often only on condition that they ruled through traditional moral wisdom.

Ordinary people also ruled themselves, through the rituals of rough music or *skimmingtons*. These traditional expressions of popular opinion took different forms in different areas, but all consisted of stylized means of regulating behavior that was regarded as immoral or unnatural. A journeyman who took less than the trade's customary price could be ducked in a river or ridden out of town on a rail. A man who beat his wife, a man who was bullied by his wife, or a woman who beat her husband could be hanged in effigy. A parish officer could be subjected to an elaborate, stylized drama on his doorstep. Usually these popular rituals, whose form was handed down by local custom, included a procession in which the offender was caricatured and ridiculed to the accompaniment of raucous music on cow bells, tin pots, warming pans, and the like.

Only rarely did rough music lead to physical violence. Its object was to express public disapproval in a way calculated to humiliate the offender. Rough music signified to all that the offender had stepped outside the moral boundaries of the community. By this public rebuke and the ostracism that followed, rough music sometimes drove its culprit to flight or even suicide. Like popular riots, rough music could not operate on behalf of a legislative platform or form the base of a sustained political movement. It worked where the established local authorities either could not or would not function in the customary way, as in popular marital issues. It was a form of law that came from within the community and lasted as long as the understanding of law was customary rather than contractual, as long as popular culture was oral rather than literate. In some localities rough music lasted well into the nineteenth century.

THE GROWTH OF THE BRITISH STATE

The realities of this informal and customary world of popular local politics contrasted sharply with the great game of parliamentary politics played by the masters of the grand country houses. Until the last decade of the century, however, popular politics did not seriously threaten the landowners' regime, nor did the oligarchy establish overly repressive rule—not in England and Wales, at least. Compared to the heavy-handed and in some cases militarized states on the Continent, the English landowners in the eighteenth century provided comparatively light government for the English, if not the Scottish and Irish people. The landed oligarchy was narrow and self-interested, but it made England a bastion of law, liberty, and localism.

Paradoxically, however, the size and power of the British state grew during the eighteenth century. The reason for its growth was the almost constant state of war. Britain was involved in major wars from 1689 to 1713, 1739 to 1748, 1755 to 1763, 1775 to 1784, and 1792 to 1815. Thus, governments did not take on much in the way of social legislation, but they nevertheless expanded the state's machinery in order to supply the logistical support for the army and navy and to subsidize allied military forces. It was typical for Britain to have more than 120,000 men under arms during wartime. To raise and supply such forces cost huge sums of money. Governmental expenditures more than tripled between 1689 and 1763, and almost three-quarters of these expenditures went to support the army and the navy. To pay the bills, the British state increased taxes by about 300 percent over the same period and raised the national debt by about 800 percent. The British state in the eighteenth century had its biggest impact on the ordinary subject by recruitment of soldiers and sailors and by taxation. Except for a few examples, all having to do with Jacobitism, battles were not fought on the soil of the British Isles, but everyone paid taxes. The excise tax became the principal form of national revenue, and because it was a tax on the sale of certain products, it affected the price of consumer goods and the cost of living.

To collect the taxes and manage the swollen expenditures, the British had to increase the number of state officials. The number of employees in the central administrative departments went up by almost 700 percent to nearly 1,000 men in the first half of the eighteenth century. In addition, the number of officials in the revenue bureaucracy tripled (to about 7,500 employees) during the same period; those in the excise office quadrupled. Tax collectors ranged throughout the country. Although all of these offices

were filled by patronage, the level of professional competence and honesty was fairly high. Patronage, in fact, worked to ensure that the new tax bureaucracy did not become alienated from the traditional ruling elite: landowners wanted to put their friends and relatives in the jobs, not to destroy the bureaucracy. At the same time, the acute sense of liberty and property that had been affirmed in 1688 and in the Revolution Settlement made the political public alert to potential abuses by the state. British political rhetoric thus was filled with the vocabulary of law and liberty. Most real government occurred at the local level, but politics became intensely focused on the central government. This was one of the clearest examples of the contrasts so characteristic of eighteenth-century British politics and government.

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Chapter 5

Religion, Rationality, and Recreation: Culture in Eighteenth-Century England

In English culture, just as in English politics, the eighteenth century was the Augustan Age. Keenly aware of the similarities between their own time and Augustan Rome, the landlords naturally took Rome as their model, adopting its standards and styles of thought in literature and the arts. The justly famous *English phlegm*—an approach to life reflecting calm deportment and a stiff upper lip—was an invention of the eighteenth century, much under the influence of Roman stoicism. Important also was the notion of “politeness,” a cultural style combining civility, decorum, and propriety that proved particularly attractive to the better-off middling sort with whom the gentry often socialized. Stately and dignified houses, superbly serene and well-crafted paintings, and realistic but cheerful literature all reflected a highly civilized life. The English Enlightenment, which flourished in the second half of the century, reinforced this culture of order, symmetry, and stability. In England, the Enlightenment stress on *reason* often translated into an emphasis on *reasonableness* and *restraint*.

Augustan high culture set the respectable ranks apart from those they regarded as the vulgar populace. Indeed, popular culture displayed little of the Augustan serenity and nothing of its classical values. Whereas eighteenth-century high culture reflected the elite’s desire to display a consensus that would legitimate and solidify the social hierarchy, the culture of the people, in contrast, was sometimes rebellious, often brutal, and always reflective of popular belief in traditional, custom-oriented standards and values.

The apparent cultural chasm between the privileged and the populace was, however, only that: apparent. Like gentlemen bedecked in silks and lace

who, in common with their servants, often went unwashed for weeks (daily full body bathing remained highly unusual in this era), the rationality and politeness of high society flourished alongside a delight in bawdiness found at all social levels. Even more importantly, the emergence of a vibrant, science-minded, commercial culture spread Enlightened values far beyond the ranks of the wealthy and privileged. This commercial culture served as the rails of the eighteenth-century English social ladder, linking its many rungs.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT IN ENGLAND

On the Continent, the ideas of the Enlightenment challenged much of the established political and religious order. In England, however, the philosophy and theology of the Augustan Age reflected the landed property owners' view of the world. For this reason, the power and security of the English landowners made the English version of the Enlightenment more moderate and less corrosive. True, in England, as elsewhere, the principal themes of Enlightened thought were *nature* and *reason*; educated English men and women generally agreed that God had designed both the natural and the social orders and had endowed humanity with the faculty of reason as a perfectly adequate means of understanding them. Because nature moves according to a divine plan and because the deity is benevolent, then whatever *is* is right. In this sense, the Augustan view of the world was essentially conservative. Similarly, the divine plan was thought to entail a static *great chain of being*, a graded hierarchy of all living things from lowest to highest in which all beings had their proper place. Within that great chain stood the human social hierarchy, with the aristocracy and gentry near the top: English gentlemen enjoyed a cosmic status just below the angels. The word *natural* tended to mean whatever was comfortable to gentlemen.

Reason held the key to decoding natural laws. Reason has often connoted a purely rational or speculative quality of thought, the special capacity that allows humanity to transcend worldly limitations. But in eighteenth-century England, reason referred to more humble powers—the logical, calculating faculty and the *reasonableness* of cool common sense and restraint. Men and women in the propertied elite disliked extremism, or what they called “enthusiasm.” Bishop Joseph Butler, for instance, said that enthusiasm is “a horrid thing, a very horrid thing.” Englishmen had learned from their experience of civil war and revolution in the seventeenth century that extremism in politics and religion leads to conflict, war, and social turmoil. Just as they sought stability in the political structure, so they would

have moderation preached in philosophy and theology. Alexander Pope, the greatest of the Augustan poets, wrote:

For forms of Government let fools contest;
Whate'er is best administered is best;
For Modes of Faith, let graceless zealots fight;
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right.

THE EMPIRICIST TRADITION

The themes of nature and reason received their clearest treatment by the empiricist philosophers of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They established the *empirical tradition*, perhaps the greatest British contribution to philosophy. British empiricism centered on the assumption that scientific observation and the accumulation of facts lead to true knowledge. In the development of this tradition, the work of Isaac Newton (1642–1727) played a pivotal role. The towering figure of the late seventeenth-century Scientific Revolution, Newton built on the earlier achievements of Galileo, Copernicus, and Kepler to set out universal laws of astronomy, mechanics, and physics. Newtonian science revealed God's creation to be an exquisite but comprehensible machine. In *Principia Mathematica* (1687), Newton combined experimental science with sophisticated mathematics to reveal that the law of gravity explains even the movements of the planets.

Newton's achievement, widely popularized, gave tremendous impetus to belief in the scientific method—careful observation, rigorous inference, and meticulous experimentation—as the avenue to true knowledge. Reason in the form of science seemed to banish mystery and open all the secrets of the world and the heavens. Pope wrote:

Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night:
God said, *Let Newton be!* and all was light!

For the next two centuries, many a scientist and intellectual sought to become the Newton of his or her own field by reducing scientifically gathered data to one or a few elegant laws.

Great as Newton's influence on philosophy was, however, that of John Locke was perhaps even greater. Locke (1632–1704) clearly articulated the three themes of central importance to eighteenth-century English thought: (1) empiricism, (2) civil government, and (3) religious toleration. In Locke's thought, and in that of most of the later empiricists, these three themes were tightly bound. They shared the notion, crucial to individual liberty, that there are natural limits to the proper claims of human thought and endeavor.

A friend of Newton and other late seventeenth-century English scientists, Locke served the Whig earl of Shaftesbury in the 1670s and 1680s. Locke was forced to flee to the Dutch Republic with his patron in 1683, returning to England only after the Revolution of 1688. He soon became known as the leading philosopher of the Whig cause. The basis of his philosophy of political moderation and religious toleration lay in his empiricist epistemology—his philosophy of how knowledge originates. Like so many other Englishmen of the time, Locke wanted to find absolutely certain answers to any number of fundamental questions. He came to think, however, that the human understanding was not capable of absolute certainty in most realms of thought because all knowledge derives from experience, the basis of which is sense perception. By reason, we are able to combine simple sensory data into complex ideas, and we are able to reflect on our own mental operations. But because all knowledge originates in sensations, we are not able to go beyond experience except in a few limited areas. Hence the boundaries of *certain* knowledge are very narrow, whereas the boundaries of *probable* knowledge are quite wide.

Locke and his followers found it unreasonable to persecute others on the basis of probable knowledge. Consequently, he disliked absolutism in politics and enthusiasm in religion. In his second *Treatise of Civil Government* (1690), Locke set out a theory of limited government. He argued that men in the state of nature are essentially reasonable and obey the basic natural law of society—that “no one ought to harm another in his life, liberty or possessions.” This was the English property owners’ social ideal. Unfortunately, not everyone obeys natural law, so in order to protect their property, people form a civil society by agreeing to a *social compact*. They give up certain of their powers to a government, but they do not relinquish their natural right of liberty and independence, nor do they surrender their sovereignty. A government therefore rules only by consent of the governed, and absolutism is incompatible with natural law and the social compact.

Obviously, Locke was justifying the outlook of his Whig patrons—individualism, rights of property, and constitutional monarchy. He did the same with his ideas on religion. Locke believed that the existence of God is demonstrable and that divine revelation of truths is possible. But he also contended that reason is the proper test of revelation and that people should beware of religious extremism. Consequently, he argued for toleration (except for Catholics, Muslims, and atheists). A church, he wrote, is a purely voluntary body and should have no compulsive authority; nor should the

state try to enforce a particular religious view. A person's religious opinions necessarily are a matter for his or her own reasoning; furthermore, the alliance of church and state normally leads to oppression.

The empiricist tradition did not remain stagnant in the positions that Newton and Locke set out. For example, the most able empirical philosopher of the next generation, George Berkeley (1685–1753), used empiricist reasoning to refute the assumed materialism (that is, that matter exists) underlying Locke's philosophy. One generation further along, the Scotsman David Hume (1711–76), perhaps the most acute thinker among the British empiricists, used reason to defeat reason and to arrive at a position of skepticism concerning the nature and existence of material objects and causal relations among them. Berkeley sought to prove the existence of God, whereas Hume hovered on the edge of atheism. But on the whole, eighteenth-century empiricists supported the assumptions and conclusions of Newton and Locke—that nature is orderly and operates by laws accessible to reason; that reason is largely a matter of manipulating the data of the senses and of restraining the passions; that reason, though limited, is perfectly adequate for human purposes; that civil society exists for the convenience of the individuals who make it up; and that as a practical matter, the members of society who count are restricted to the propertied stratum.

NATURE, GOD, AND MORALITY

Hume's religious skepticism was unusual in eighteenth-century England. The more typical Augustan view was that reason and Christian revelation were entirely compatible; indeed, this religiosity was the most clear-cut difference between the Enlightenment in England and that in France. Locke, who remained a Christian, believed that the very order of nature reveals the existence of God. "The works of Nature," he said, "everywhere evidence a Deity."

Locke's view expressed the essence of a central position of Augustan thinkers—namely, *natural theology*. Most eighteenth-century English men and women believed that Nature was, like the Bible, a "book" of divine revelation: the study of nature, via reason and science, shows its providential design—that is, that God governs the world and human development. Reason supports revelation, and revelation reason. The world, including its human inhabitants, is no ruin reflecting the fall of Adam; rather, it is the product of divine wisdom and benevolence. Every thing and every person,

then, has its proper place—in the words of theologian William Law, “each man walking in Godly wise in his state of wealth and poverty.” Even poverty and ignorance have their appropriate roles to play. Poverty is beneficial because it calls forth the charity of the rich. Ignorance, said the Reverend Soames Jenyns, “is the opiate of the poor, a cordial administered by the gracious hand of providence.”

For some Augustan thinkers, however, the orderly whirl of the universal machine removed the need for providential action. *Deists* such as John Toland and Viscount Bolingbroke believed that reason and nature teach that God exists, but not a personal, intervening, or active God. The deity, they contended, created the universe according to natural law and then let it operate on its own. Insofar as Christianity teaches a morality consistent with reason, then Christianity is useful, but insofar as it rests its claims to authority on miracle stories (for which there can be no scientific evidence), then Christianity is merely a superstition.

Many of these ideas structured one of the most important books published in eighteenth-century England: Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. In his insistence on looking to evidence rather than tradition for historical truth, Gibbon (1737–94) was very much a man of the Enlightenment. He treated early Christianity as one among many eastern religions; looked to historical rather than supernatural explanations for its expansion; and, most controversially, identified that expansion as a key factor in eroding the martial values of Roman civilization. Gibbon’s depiction of early Christians as intolerant zealots may have been a little extreme for eighteenth-century Englishmen, but his argument reflected the prevailing skepticism and rationality of Enlightened culture. “My book,” he recalled, “was on every table, and on almost every toilette; the historian was crowned by the taste or fashion of the day.”

Deism remained the religion of a relatively small number of people and never had the influence in England that it had elsewhere; nevertheless, it struck orthodox theologians as the great danger of the day and thus called forth one of the most influential books of the eighteenth (and nineteenth) century—Joseph Butler’s *Analogy of Religion*. Bishop Butler wanted to show that acceptance of Christianity is perfectly reasonable. Everyone agrees, he argued, that scientific truths are only probable and leave many questions unexplained, yet devotees of reason such as the deists unhesitatingly accept scientific findings as natural laws. By the same token, Butler wrote, we should have no qualms in believing religious truths, which, if ultimately mysterious, are also probable.

Butler also contended that it is probable that our behavior in this world determines our happiness in the next. This formulation of a system of ethics based on *reason* characterized much of eighteenth-century English thought. Because the educated elite were shifting their attention from speculation about the supernatural to more mundane concerns, moral philosophy was of great interest to them. They wanted to know how to lead virtuous lives (as long as virtue did not disturb their pursuit of happiness) and they liked to think their ethical code was based on reason. The interests of the property owners made *utilitarian* ethics popular. Utilitarianism holds that behavior should be based on a calculation of pleasures and pains. Although the pleasures and pains Butler had in mind would come in heaven or hell, other eighteenth-century utilitarians were more worldly: if we pursue our individual pleasure and avoid pain on this earth, we will in fact be pursuing virtue and avoiding vice. This was Locke's view, and a very convenient one it was for the Whig oligarchy.

Not all moralists, however, subscribed to the *reason* school of ethics, whether in its utilitarian or its less extreme forms. Some moral philosophers contended instead that people have an *innate moral sense*. To know how to act, all one has to do is look within the conscience. Yet whether moralists were of the moral sense or the reason school, all agreed that in the refined and reasonable English gentleman would be found the proper standard of behavior. Lord Shaftesbury, the son of Locke's patron, put it this way: "The Taste of Beauty, and the Relish of what is decent, just, and amiable, perfects the Character of the Gentleman and the Philosopher."

Such a morality, of course, led easily to complacency, for it tended to confuse superficial attributes with genuine morals, and those failings in turn sometimes encouraged dissimulation and cynicism. These qualities were perfectly displayed by the career diplomat and politician Lord Chesterfield in his justly famous *Letters to His Son* (1774). In these charming epistles of advice, Chesterfield tried to sculpt his son into the epitome of the courtly gentleman—reserved while seeming frank, mannered while seeming natural. The essence of his message was the *utility* of moral virtue and social graces, to the point that they became almost identical. "Pleasure is now, and ought to be, your business," Chesterfield advised. To get ahead in the gentlemanly world, one should bring pleasure to others by an artful cultivation of speech, deportment, fashion, and flattery. By this cultivation of refinement, Augustan empiricism and worldliness were put to good use: "Every man is to be had one way or another, and everywoman almost any way."

RELIGION AND THE CHURCH IN ENGLAND

The twin forces of the Enlightenment and the dominance of the landed elite shaped the institutions of religion in eighteenth-century England. The Church of England stood in a position of unparalleled power. Even though the Toleration Act allowed Dissenters to worship in their own congregations and the practice of occasional conformity allowed them to take public office, the Church of England enjoyed the benefits of establishment, and Anglicans monopolized national and local government. Scarred by the anti-Puritan reaction of the late seventeenth century, Dissenters were content for the time to protect the toleration they had been granted and to work quietly for full political rights. Their numbers dwindled to about 250,000 by 1760. Roman Catholics remained a tiny and passive element in England, growing slightly after 1780 because of Irish immigration, but still numbering only about 80,000 in 1760. Almost everyone else was at least nominally an Anglican.

Both the hierarchical social structure and the preeminence of reason in English thought and culture shaped the eighteenth-century Church of England. Because the preference of propertied folk was for balance and moderation and for matters of this world, the fires of religion burned low. Confident in their understanding of divine providence, the Anglican landed elite believed firmly in the importance of the church for upholding the social, political, and moral order, but tended to equate more emotional forms of religiosity with fanaticism. (John Wesley was to react strongly against this religious restraint, but because the impact of his teachings came late in the century, it will be discussed in chapter 12.)

Anglicanism's dominance and the elite's disavowal of emotional religion did not mean that religious issues were unimportant. Religious debates, in fact, continued to characterize party political life and to roil Anglican affairs. Those who came to be known as *High Churchmen* resented the subordination of the Church to the state. They thought that the toleration of Dissenters should cease, for they believed that the Church of England as a divine institution ought to be recognized by the state as the only means of salvation. High Churchmen got Tory support, but as Toryism declined in political influence, the High Church position lost out in the corridors of power to the *Low Church*. The Low Church view was *Erastian*—that is, Low Churchmen believed that the church is properly subject to the dictates of the state because it is essentially a voluntary association of believers, not a

uniquely divine institution. The Low Church view prevailed among the Anglican bishops partly because of the general cultural trend toward moderation and toleration and partly because the Crown and the Whigs favored the Low Church position. Hence, the triumph of Whiggery threw the weight of patronage behind Low Churchmen.

The Church's hierarchy was thus deeply enmeshed in Whig politics. As members of the House of Lords, the twenty-six bishops were crucial to Whig control of the upper chamber. Walpole and his successors made sure that no one except politically sound men were appointed to the episcopal bench, and they made it clear to every bishop or lower church appointee what political behavior was expected. Any clergyman hoping for promotion had to be loyal to the government. Ambitious clergymen spent their careers jostling for places and maneuvering for political favors. When the holder of a desirable church office died, likely contenders scrambled for the spot. It was not unusual to see anxious candidates waiting in an anteroom, while inside a bishop breathed his last. Sometimes a candidate could not wait. One Thomas Newton wrote the duke of Newcastle, "I think it my duty to acquaint yr. grace that the Archbishop of York lies a-dying, and, as all here think, cannot possibly live beyond tomorrow morning, if so long; upon this occasion of two vacancies, I beg, I hope, I trust your Grace's kindness and goodness will be shown to one who has long solicited your favour."

Once appointed, such people often focused their sights on the next juicy plum dangling above. Bishop Hoadly, the most outspoken Low Churchman and a favorite of the Whigs, was made bishop of Bangor in 1715 and was promoted to Hereford in 1721, having gone only once to Bangor. In 1723, he was promoted from Hereford, never having traveled there at all. He occupied himself with politics and was finally raised to the wealthy See of Winchester in 1734. Some bishops attended to their duties in the House of Lords, at least, but at other times conducted themselves like wealthy landowners.

Such behavior was bound to affect the performance of the ordinary clergy of the parishes. They typically behaved as what they were, members of the gentry, for the clergy became a respectable and undemanding livelihood for younger sons of the landed orders. An increasing number served alongside the squires as JPs. Critics noted that the country clergy often seemed more concerned to keep up in the swirl of society and politics in the great country houses of the oligarchy than to tend to their parishes. The

Anglican clergy justifiably won the reputation of eating well, hunting foxes, and drinking port. One foreign observer noted:

... it is pleasant to see how fat and fair these parsons are. They are charged with being somewhat lazy, and their usual plumpness makes it suspected that there's some truth in it. It is common to see them in coffee houses, and even in taverns, with pipes in their mouths.

Of course, there was many a kindly and caring parson, a brother to the squire and father to the laborers in the parish. Certainly, the parsons helped maintain the wholeness, if not always the holiness, of society. But the economics of clerical arrangements often made performance of their duties difficult. Most parish priests were paid by endowments (*livings*) established years before by individual landlords, whose descendants still held the right of appointment. In many cases, inflation had made the salary criminally low—£15 or £20 a year. Further, many parsons, once appointed to a living, had no intention of going there. Such a rector would hire a curate to do his duties. Of course, because the holder of the living paid the curate out of his own stipend, he would keep the pay as low as possible. Whereas the rector of Warton parish enjoyed £700 a year, one of his curates got only £5. Other clergymen, in order to make ends meet or simply to maximize their incomes, took more than one parish. As a consequence, plural holdings and nonresidence were grave problems. As late as 1809, 7,358 clergy out of 11,194 were nonresident. Moreover, as towns grew, ancient parish divisions no longer coincided with the real distribution of the population. Few new churches were built, so some large towns—Manchester, for example, with a population of twenty thousand—had only one church. Many clergymen were badly overworked and underpaid; others, blessed by the scramble for preferment, were overpaid and underworked.

Many of the backwoods parsons were rabid Tories, even Jacobites, and therefore High Churchmen. Most others, however, held a position in between the individualism of Puritanism and the authoritative centralism of Catholicism. This position, called *latitudinarianism*, held that human reason was sufficient to deal with most issues; for the rest, revelation was necessary—revelation as interpreted by the one true church, the Church of England. In any case, most clergymen in their teachings shied away from theological principles and concerned themselves with everyday ethics and morals. Their message inevitably reflected the outlook of their patrician patrons, tempered by reasonableness and benevolence: charity for the rich and obedience for the poor. The point of the established church, after all, was to give liturgical expression to the existing social order.

COMMERCIALIZATION AND CULTURE: THE WRITTEN WORD

The existing social order, however, was undergoing enormous change during the eighteenth century. England was the most rapidly urbanizing region in Europe: urban growth in England accounted for 50 percent of all European urbanization between 1700 and 1750, and for a colossal 70 percent between 1750 and 1800. Provincial towns grew at an even faster rate than London, with the expansion of aristocratic leisure spots such as Brighton and Bath and important manufacturing centers such as Manchester and Sheffield. As early as 1750, more English men and women worked in manufacturing, commerce, and services than in agriculture. These commercial and industrial populations constituted a new reading public and challenged the landed elite's long domination of English cultural production. Eighteenth-century literature thus provided powerful testimony to the contrasts and contradictions of Augustan England—elegant order versus unrestrained exuberance, rational discourse versus bawdy satire, classical regulation versus commercial experimentation, the power of the landed elite versus the expanding influence of the middling sort.

In poetry we can see the power of the landed elite. Poetry continued to find its support in patronage, but poets now turned to the aristocracy rather than the Crown for patrons. Poetry accounted for a remarkable 47 percent of all titles published in the eighteenth century and provides a literary parallel to the emphasis of the Enlightenment on natural law. Just as the physical universe ran according to laws discernible to the rational observer, so each poetic genre was thought to have its appropriate kind of diction, meter, and versification, as discovered by classical authors. Thus, poetry of the Augustan Age, at least until the beginnings of Romanticism toward the end of the century, emphasized correctness of feeling and expression. Augustan readers and writers believed that poetry must conform to nature, in the sense of the permanent, universal attributes of human nature, and that classical poets expressed these eternal qualities best. As Pope wrote:

Those RULES of old discover'd, not devis'd
Are Nature still, but Nature Methodized;
Nature, like Liberty, is but restrain'd
By the same Laws which first herself ordain'd.

Although poets such as Pope wrote for their aristocratic patrons, prose writers turned increasingly to the new reading public—larger, of middling social status, commercialized, and consisting of women as well as men. Thus, the demands of the marketplace rather than classical rules governed the production of prose. One sign of this change appeared in the first pages

of prose publications: prefaces for the general reader replaced the traditional dedication to an aristocratic patron. The members of the new reading public wanted two things: first, entertainment for their leisure hours, and second, information and guidance about every aspect of life and thought. Many of them had just climbed up the next rung of the status ladder; ambitious and insecure, they looked to literature to teach them how to behave. Hence, a popular press flourished, producing books of sermons, dictionaries, encyclopedias, histories, and periodicals such as *The Spectator* and the *Gentleman's Magazine*. By mid-century, the leading periodicals sold perhaps ten thousand copies per issue—not a huge number by twenty-first-century standards, but unprecedented for the time.

Such periodicals featured superbly clear prose and clever satire, the two literary tools most suitable for social instruction and for moderate social criticism—and the literary tools most characteristic of Enlightenment writing. Many periodical writers, such as Joseph Addison, editor of *The Spectator*, sought through their works to encourage the free exchange of ideas that they believed to be essential for human advancement. Addison explained that the purpose of *The Spectator* was to lift “Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables and in Coffee-Houses.” By stimulating “polite conversation” (that is, reasoned discussion), periodical writers and book authors aimed to contribute to the “wearing out of Ignorance, Passion, and Prejudice.”

Women joined fully in this new ideal of rational exchange. Periodicals such as *The Ladies' Mercury* testified to the growing presence of women in the new public space that Enlightenment thinkers regarded as essential for the free trade of ideas. Writers such as Hester Chapone (1727–1801) wrote *conduct books* in which they not only advised their female readers on proper etiquette, but much more importantly, insisted on the right and responsibility of women to educate their minds and to join in Enlightened conversation. Chapone was part of the famous *bluestocking circle* of female intellectuals that centered on the lavish home of the one of the wealthiest women of the era, Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800). A writer herself, Montagu used her money and position to foster the careers of many leading eighteenth-century essayists, novelists, and artists. At her well-known *salon*, the brightest men and women of eighteenth-century society gathered for witty conversation and intellectual exchange.

The most important response to the new reading public was the novel, which was for all practical purposes invented in the eighteenth century.

With its emphasis on realism, its focus on the individual, its freedom from classical rules, and its capacity to combine entertainment, instruction, and moral guidance, the novel was the perfect format for the age. Published in 1719, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is often regarded as the first genuine novel. Despite its rollicking story line—the fictional Crusoe endures two shipwrecks; fights off mutineers, pirates, cannibals, and wolves; and constructs his own little European kingdom on the island on which he is marooned for many years—it offered readers a hero with whom they could identify, a man endowed with no special powers other than his own natural wit and rational faculties, as well as his developing religious faith. To many readers, it was the supreme Enlightenment tale, the triumph of human rationality over nature and savagery, as well as an assertion of the supremacy of Western technology and trade. Others embraced it as primarily a Protestant parable, in which a shipwrecked soul reads the Bible and finds salvation. In any case, it went through four editions in its first year of publication and remained hugely popular throughout the eighteenth century.

A generation after Defoe, writers turned to less exotic settings to offer novels that dissected English society and laid bare its inner workings. At the age of fifty-one, printer and publisher Samuel Richardson (1689–1761) decided to try writing his own book. *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, proved to be a sensation and catapulted Richardson into high society. *Pamela*-themed playing cards, waxworks, paintings, and prints testified to the novel's popularity. At first glance, the heroine of *Pamela*, an innocent fifteen-year-old maidservant, seems a sharp contrast to the adventurous Crusoe. Yet, like Crusoe, Pamela triumphs over great adversity. Her young master attempts to seduce her, kidnaps her, and even tries to rape her, yet she remains virtuous and in the end is rewarded with marriage into the gentry and the admiration of her new peers. Although Pamela's triumph purifies and thus strengthens the social order, the novel defined virtue not by birth but by behavior, a message profoundly appealing to the expanding middling sort of eighteenth-century England.

Richardson's colleague Henry Fielding (1707–54) offered a similar lesson in his riotous satire *Tom Jones* (1749). On his path to virtue (and marriage to the beautiful Sophia), the high-spirited Tom indulges in a variety of sexual escapades, but he proves himself to be fundamentally honest and good-hearted. The novel concludes with a clear affirmation of Enlightened England's faith in reasoned discourse and human improvement: "Whatever in the nature of Jones had a tendency to vice, has been corrected by

continual conversation with this good man [his uncle, Squire Allworthy], and by his union with the lovely and virtuous Sophia. He hath also, by reflection on his past follies, acquired a discretion and prudence very uncommon in one of his lively parts.”

Women played a central role in defining and expanding the boundaries of the early novel. For example, in *The Female Quixote* (1752), Charlotte Lennox (1729–1804) used the misadventures of her heroine Arabella to draw the lines between traditional romance, with its excited emotions, exotic settings, and over-the-top plots, and the new realistic novel. As Lennox’s young, female, and English version of the famous Don Quixote searches for a chivalrous knight in eighteenth-century London and Bath, her failures and successes provide a delightful commentary on both the society she encounters and the limits of romantic dreaming.

The Female Quixote can be seen as an early form of the *novel of manners*, a genre that took on its developed form later in the century. An intricate exploration of the social mores and ethical values of a particular class of people in a particular place and time, the novel of manners highlights the tensions between individual ambitions and wider social expectations and regulations. It is no surprise that this genre first flourished in eighteenth-century England, with its emphasis on proper behavior and its tendency to confuse manners with morality and etiquette with ethics. Nor is it a surprise that women, often the ultimate arbiters of proper behavior, helped define the genre. Frances or Fanny Burney (1752–1840) had great success with her novels of manners, most particularly *Evelina*, published in 1778. Brought up in the simple household of the worthy Reverend Villars, Burney’s heroine is completely unprepared for the complexities and intrigues of English high society. As *Evelina* stumbles from one hilarious embarrassment to the next, her journey helps the reader map out the tortuous terrain of England’s social hierarchy.

The novel of manners reached its culmination in the works of one of the greatest of all English novelists, Jane Austen (1775–1817). Austen stands at the turning point between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: although her six novels were first published between 1811 and 1818 (the last two posthumously), she wrote the early drafts of a number of them in the 1790s. Like Burney, Austen focused her novels on the gentry; in witty comedies of manners such as *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Emma* (1815), she punctured the pretensions of the landed elite without, however, challenging that elite’s position. Duty and deference, patronage and place, order and authority all regulate Austen’s characters. At the same time, however, her

strong and sassy heroines laid claim to their roles as rational individuals, making reasoned choices to improve their lives.

COMMERCIALIZATION AND CULTURE: THE VISUAL ARTS

Like most aspects of eighteenth-century society, the visual arts reflected both the continuing power of traditional patronage and the new dominance of more market-oriented arrangements. The values and wishes of their patrician consumers heavily shaped architecture and painting, which thus tended to express symbolically the hierarchical social order and the sensibility of the ruling elite. At the same time, however, the growing wealth of England generated a booming market in art objects—paintings, sculpture, furnishings, and the like. This market, associated as it was with the consumer revolution, went a long way toward commodifying high culture and adapting it to a new commercial age.

The main achievement of late seventeenth-century architecture was in ecclesiastical building; here, the Church played its traditional role as an important patron of the arts. Sir Christopher Wren (1652–1725), the friend and colleague in the Royal Society of Newton and Locke, helped recast the skyline of London after the Great Fire of London (1666). Wren's fifty-five city churches—plus St. Paul's Cathedral—embodied his main themes of compromise, moderation, and harmony. He managed to merge the Italian Catholic baroque style (with its ornate decoration, classical forms, and sensual rhythms of concave and convex lines) with the Dutch Calvinist preaching hall (with its plain rectangular shape and severe decoration). In the work of his successors, such as James Gibbs (1682–1754), who designed St. Martin-in-the-Fields, the compromise shifted more to classical style, combining a single steeple (a Gothic element) with a rectangular hall fronted by classical columns and a hexastyle (triangular) portico. These serene churches expressed perfectly the Anglican compromise between Catholicism and Calvinism and appealed immediately to reason as well. The style spread widely in Protestant Britain and to America also, where it became the standard form of Protestant architecture.

In the eighteenth century, however, the great architectural monuments were the homes of the landed elite. According to one French traveler, "The multitude of gentlemen's houses, scattered over the country, is a feature quite peculiar to the English landscape; the thing is unknown in France." English patricians thought it important to live most of the year on their estates so as to play the social and governmental roles they had claimed for



St. Martin's-in-the-Field, designed by Sir James Gibbs (early eighteenth century). This beautiful church, a favorite with tourists, is perhaps the best example of neo-classical church architecture in England.

themselves. Those who could afford it moved to London for the spring *season* and rotated through spas such as Tunbridge Wells and Bath. But their country houses composed the focal points of high culture, set as they were in pleasing parks and filled with rich furnishings and fine paintings. The gentleman's country "seat" was the principal means by which he showed his taste and refinement and served as the base of operations for his beloved hunting sports. Thus, the great country houses were the setting for endless entertaining, for local estate and governmental business, for partisan political talk, and not least for sheer enjoyment of the fat of the land. Lord Hervey recalled of his visits to Houghton, Walpole's estate in Norfolk: "We used to sit down to dinner a snug little party of about thirty odd, up to the chin in beef, venison, geese, turkeys, etc.; and generally over the chin in claret, strong beer, and punch."

The design of the great country houses reflected these functions. Magnificent and elegant on the interior, they displayed the wealth and taste of the owner to others of the same social stratum; stately and grave on the



Mereworth Castle, Kent, designed by Colen Campbell (1723). Mereworth Castle is a fine example of the Palladian house. Notice the perfect symmetry.

exterior, these striking buildings overawed the common folk. *Symmetry* was the pervasive theme. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the taste for the Baroque produced symmetrical but monumentally heavy piles, of which the great representative was (and is) the duke of Marlborough's Blenheim Palace. But as the eighteenth century advanced, the Whig preference for the appearance of moderation made the country houses less formal. The surrounding parks, designed by landscape architects such as Capability Brown, shifted away from geometrical formality toward the *natural*—nature tamed by reasonableness. The houses themselves retained the symmetry of baroque, but now stressed simplicity and proportion.

The new style was called *Palladian*, after the sixteenth-century architect Andrea Palladio, who was thought to have derived perfect formulas from Roman buildings. The typical Palladian house, exemplified by Mereworth Castle, began with a main rectangular block of several stories flanked on either side by precisely matched wings, fronted by rows of classical windows, and topped by a hexastyle portico over the main entrance. Inside, the design separated the business rooms and servants' areas *below stairs* from the elegant halls, drawing rooms, and chambers of the family *above stairs*.

Perhaps it is almost inevitable that portraiture was the characteristic mode of English painting. The patricians were, after all, deeply interested in the individual—and above all, in themselves. Moreover, the production of portraits remained thoroughly ensconced in the traditional patron-client relationship; commissioning portraits was yet another way for members of the landed elite to demonstrate their social power. Yet portraits under their influence became less heroic and grandiose than in the seventeenth century, for the landlords intended to have themselves depicted at ease in the world they had won. Leading Augustan portrait painters, such as Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–92) and Thomas Gainsborough (1727–88), often painted their subjects at home in their country houses, lords of all they surveyed. Reynolds, the son of an Anglican priest, grew up on the edge of the gentry, but climbed to the top of London society through the patronage of important peers, including the duke of Cumberland, George II's third son. Reynolds traveled and trained on the Continent, and became famous for his theory of the *grand style*—painting by the classical rules established by the old masters, concern for the general and ideal, and strict proportion—even at the expense of taking liberties with the actual features of the subject. Gainsborough came from the lower rungs of the social ladder; the son of a weaver, he was first apprenticed to an engraver, but by moving to Bath, the favorite elite holiday spot, and turning to portrait painting, he was soon able to attract wealthy patrons. Less formalized than Reynolds, he too portrayed his ladies and gentlemen in such a way as to express an ideal of ease, dignity, and grace.

Few people below the ranks of the landed elite could afford formal portraits; nonetheless, in the prosperous English towns and cities, and above all in London, well-to-do commercial people—men and women alike—joined the landed elite in pursuing and purchasing paintings, sculpture, tapestries, drapes, furniture, and decorative items. The members of this cultural elite were intent on equipping their grand country homes and town houses to impress each other, and on distinguishing themselves by their refined taste—their politeness—from the common folk, particularly those individuals of the middling sort who dared aspire for gentle status. The demand for Old Masters resulted in the importation from the continent of some fifty thousand paintings between 1720 and 1770, and ten times that many etchings and engravings. The establishment of galleries and auction houses in London, as well as the founding of the Royal Academy in 1768, helped to define and control high standards of taste. As an unintended consequence of



Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse, by Sir Joshua Reynolds (1784). Reynolds painted in the grand style, striving for classical proportions and the ennoblement of his subjects through their pose or costume.

this process of commodification, the very notion of the fine arts as a distinct (and superior) realm of human activity came into being.

The harmonious symmetry, exquisite furnishings, and elegant portraits of the great country houses thus speak to a culture of restraint and refinement. Other forms of visual art, however, reveal a very different picture. The rapid commercialization of English society meant an expanding market for engravings and woodcuts that could be cheaply reproduced in large quantities. These prints strip away the decorum of polite society and expose a culture as dedicated to excess and debauchery as to rational conversation and intellectual improvement. Brash and bawdy, these prints remind us that, as the historian J. H. Plumb has written, “an exceedingly frank acknowledgement, one might almost say a relish, of man’s animal functions was as much a part of the age as the elegant furniture or delicate china.”¹

From this context arose one of the eighteenth-century England’s maverick geniuses—William Hogarth (1697–1764), widely acknowledged as the father of satirical caricature and the grandfather of the political cartoon. Hogarth came out of the ranks of the London middling sort, but he

¹Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London*, 4.



A Row at a Cock and Hen Club by Richard Newton (1798). Men in the middle ranks and above joined private clubs where they ate, drank, and as this print shows, engaged in other, more rowdy, activities.

experienced the rough edges of life: his father had to enter debtor's prison after the school he ran foundered. Standing on the outside of the landed elite, Hogarth had a keen eye for the hypocrisy and corruption of the day. He hated what he called *phiz-mongering*—idealized portraiture to please the rich—and sought to give a broad view of social life in the mode of dramatic narrative paintings. Each of these is as delightfully satirical, instructive, and morally didactic as a Fielding novel—and like a Fielding novel, Hogarth's work appealed especially to the expanding middling sort, who delighted in his wit. In numerous paintings and engravings, Hogarth revealed the greed, vanity, and turmoil that surged beneath the veneer of Augustan high culture.

POPULAR CULTURE, COMMON CULTURES

The finely graded hierarchies of eighteenth-century society and the vast gap between rich and poor meant that the laboring poor and the wealthier orders often seemed to inhabit separate worlds. The fine arts, of course, did

not enter much into the lives of laborers, although it must not be assumed that their work demanded no knowledge or cultural framework. A husbandman, for instance, had to know about the soil, the weather, and the crops; about feeding and caring for animals; about plowing, cultivating, draining, hedging, thatching, brickmaking, and woodworking; and about spinning or weaving for the slack season. A woman had to know about dairying, brewing, and gardening and about spinning, sewing, and lace making. Even more impressive were the skills, often carefully guarded “mysteries,” of particular crafts. A wheelwright, for instance, had to know which wood was best for spokes (oak), hubs (willow or elm), and felloes (ash). He had to cut and season the wood properly, and then saw and plane it with great precision so that the wheel was perfectly round and the spokes chamfered out at the right degree. All such knowledge was passed on during years of hands-on experience and through oral and traditional culture.

Schooling and literacy had comparatively little to do with how common people made a living, nor did they contribute a great deal to the common folk’s understanding of themselves and their world. In rural districts, probably less than half the men and a quarter of the women possessed even a rudimentary ability to read and write. Schools available to the laboring people consisted of some charity schools; a growing number of Sunday schools (which taught the basics of reading and arithmetic); and a larger number of tiny, ephemeral schools run by individuals on a private-enterprise basis. The teachers in this last category often hung out their teaching shingle simply because they could find no other way to make a living. (In contrast, in Scotland the kirk established schools in many localities.) Probably a majority of the English laboring poor who could read learned from their parents or taught themselves. Only in the cities (and especially in London) among the skilled craftsmen and shopkeepers did literacy penetrate very far.

Although traveling peddlers brought information about politics and public events from outside the parish, people were very parochial and intensely suspicious of strangers. This localism obviously was under attack from the expanding network of trade and consumer goods, but it remained of real importance well into the nineteenth century. What ordinary villagers knew about themselves and their world came from an amalgam of custom, oral traditions, and religion. Nursery rhymes, legends, folk tales, popular songs, and other oral traditions all taught traditional wisdom. Weekly sermons in the parish church provided a conceptual framework as well as moral guidance—at least in those parishes where clergymen did not neglect their pastoral responsibilities.

In any case, common folk tended to attribute their own meanings to Christian rituals. Baptism, for example, was sometimes thought to make a child physically strong. Puritanism, inherited from the seventeenth century, did continue to hold sway in some households, particularly among town craftsmen who remembered the ideal of the freeborn Englishman and who cherished two books—the Bible and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the seventeenth-century Puritan allegory of a Christian's progress through temptation and despair. In the countryside, however, popular consciousness largely depended on beliefs passed on through oral culture. Superstition and magic gave the laboring poor, especially in the countryside, some sense of control over their environment. Thus, they continued to believe in ghosts and witchcraft and resorted to magical folk medicine for healing the sick and to village wise men for foretelling the future or finding lost articles.

The poor found relief from the harsh realities of life in a wide variety of recreations, many of which have now disappeared. There were routine enjoyments such as telling stories over domestic work, singing in the fields or at the loom, or behaving playfully on trips to the market. The more public recreations often took a more ritualized form and sprang from the traditional calendar of holidays—a combination of Christian holy days and significant moments in the agricultural year. Almost every parish held annual festivals, or *wakes*. For instance, in Claybrook at the parish wake, it was observed, "The cousins assemble from all quarters, fill the church on Sunday, and celebrate the Monday with feasting, with music, and with dancing." Annual fairs for hiring laborers or for selling horses, cattle, leather goods, and the like gave opportunities for mixing business with pleasure. Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide were the occasions for holidays and festivities, as were plow and harvest times. Many such festivals mixed the secular and the sacred calendars; all of them gave the populace a chance to play games, eat heartily, get drunk, and flirt with the opposite sex—in short, to escape the rules of everyday life.

Many of the popular recreations were purely of and for the laboring people. Varieties of soccer, for example, pitted the men of one village against those of another. Drinking and games of quoits and bowling in the omnipresent public houses were strictly for the populace. Yet many of the popular recreations were approved, and even sponsored, by the gentry. Some recreations were exclusively for the gentry—most notably fox hunting, whereby the rich displayed their finery, horsemanship, boldness, and power. Other recreations allowed for social mixing, like horse racing, staged by the

rich (and indeed becoming a fetish among them, which it remains), but also attracting large numbers of ordinary spectators, as did cock fights and boxing.

Further, the gentry customarily entertained the local folk at important moments in the great family's life—the birth, coming of age, and marriage of a son. On such occasions, the landowners incorporated the laboring poor into rustic celebrations of the continuity of the lineage. Similarly, the gentry typically treated the common people to food and drink at harvest home and parish feast days. Tradition and the need to preserve the loyalty of the laborers dictated the squire's generosity. As Sir Joseph Banks noted ruefully in 1783: "This is the day of our fair when according to immemorial custom I am to feed and make drunk everyone who wishes to come which cost me in beef and ale near 20 pounds." In a more bloodthirsty line, gentlemen usually provided the unfortunate animal for bull baiting, which was a popular activity, not least because it normally ended with the slaughter of the bull for the poor to eat. Like the squires' typical willingness to negotiate with food rioters, their cooperation with popular recreations helped preserve the coherence of the local community and the deference on which their rule stood.



Vauxhall Gardens by Thomas Rowlandson (1784). At pleasure gardens such as Vauxhall, eighteenth-century English men and women could choose to see and be seen—or to disappear down the dark pathways for illicit meetings. Rowlandson placed many well-known figures in this painting, including on the right the prince of Wales whispering to his lover, actress Perdita Robinson.

In the cities, too, rich and poor intermingled in a common culture. Laborers, for example, jostled alongside their social betters at the windows of the print sellers to view the latest scandalous pictures. Concert hall and opera house tickets were well beyond the reach of ordinary folk, but at theaters, laborers in the cheap seats and the wealthy in the boxes enjoyed booing and cheering the same performances. Because the house was not darkened for the performance, watching and commenting on fellow audience members was as much a part of the show as what happened on stage. Pleasure gardens also provided a venue for the mixing of social ranks and the enjoyment of a common culture. Featuring concerts, art exhibitions, acrobatic performances, and fireworks displays, as well as elaborately landscaped gardens dotted with pathways and secluded enclosures, pleasure gardens such as the famed Vauxhall attracted enormous crowds drawn from all ranks of society. With its blend of the refined and the raucous, the pleasure garden in many ways epitomized eighteenth-century English culture in all its contrasts and contradictions.

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Chapter 6

Scotland in the Eighteenth Century

Scotland's transformation in the eighteenth century was even more rapid and dramatic than England's, and even more strongly driven by the tension between custom and contract. In the Highlands, in particular, a traditional society based on personal ties and paternalist loyalties battled against a new social order engineered by market forces and characterized by a faith in human rationality. Economic and political instability marked the first half of the century, erupting into armed rebellion as Jacobite forces sought to undo not only the Union but also the Revolution Settlement. The Jacobites were defeated, however, and so too was the culture that had most strongly nourished Scottish Jacobitism. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Highland culture, the most coherent and complete stronghold of Gaelic life and of the traditional customary order in the British Isles, was nearly eradicated as the economy and the society of the Highlands was made over in the English image. Ironically, the triumph of contract and its Whig proponents in Scotland coincided with a wonderful flowering of Enlightened high culture in the cities of the Lowlands during the latter half of the century. As in England, then, the eighteenth century in Scotland was a period of sharp contrasts.

THE JACOBITE REBELLION OF 1715

We saw in chapter 3 that the Act of Union of 1707 abolished the Scottish Parliament and created the new state of Great Britain. The predicted economic benefits of union eventually came true, but not in the short run. Scottish goods proved to be of a quality that was too low to compete well in the vast market the Scots had joined. The trade in cattle flourished, but most others languished. The Scottish representatives in Parliament could

offer little help because they were too few to be effective and were soon co-opted by patronage into the Whig political system. The English-dominated Parliament proceeded to administer a series of blows that further alienated Scottish opinion. In 1712, it restored the right of lay patrons (usually large landowners) to appoint ministers to parish livings in the Church of Scotland, an extension of patronage that violated the very principle of Presbyterianism. Scottish fears that the Union would “bind up our hands from asserting our religious and civil libertys, and meanteaning a work of Reformation” seemed well-founded. The next year, Parliament attempted to extend the English malt tax to Scotland, which would have raised the price of beer and whiskey. Scots regarded this tax as the last straw, and the Scottish members of Parliament (MPs) in London actually moved for dissolution of the Union—to no avail, of course.

All of this discontent in Scotland fed the fires of Jacobitism. Scottish Jacobitism amounted to more than ceremonial toasts to “the king over the water.” The Treaty of Union, intensely unpopular in its own right, made the Jacobites the heirs of Scottish patriotism because the Union had been closely tied to recognition of the Hanoverian succession. Moreover, Jacobitism had particularly strong roots in the Catholic and Episcopal populations, especially in the Highland clans. The clans had never taken to Presbyterianism, and the Highland tradition of loyalty to one’s chief made the Jacobite principle of hereditary right to the monarchy ring true. For all these reasons, Jacobitism was a more formidable force in Scotland than in England, and by 1714 Scotland stood on the verge of a major rebellion.

Yet the chances of such a rebellion succeeding were limited by Jacobite weaknesses, the same that hobbled the movement throughout its history. First, there was the obstinacy and political clumsiness of the Stuart line. James II had died and had been succeeded in exile by his son, James Edward (“The Old Pretender”), a melancholy and reserved man incapable of inspirational leadership. Second, the Stuarts in exile were completely dependent on the French, whose support for the Jacobite cause waxed and waned as French interests dictated. Third, there was a fundamental confusion in Jacobitism: the desire for Scottish independence clashed with loyalty to the Stuarts, who considered themselves to be kings of England and Ireland as well as Scotland, and who wanted to maintain the union of the crowns.

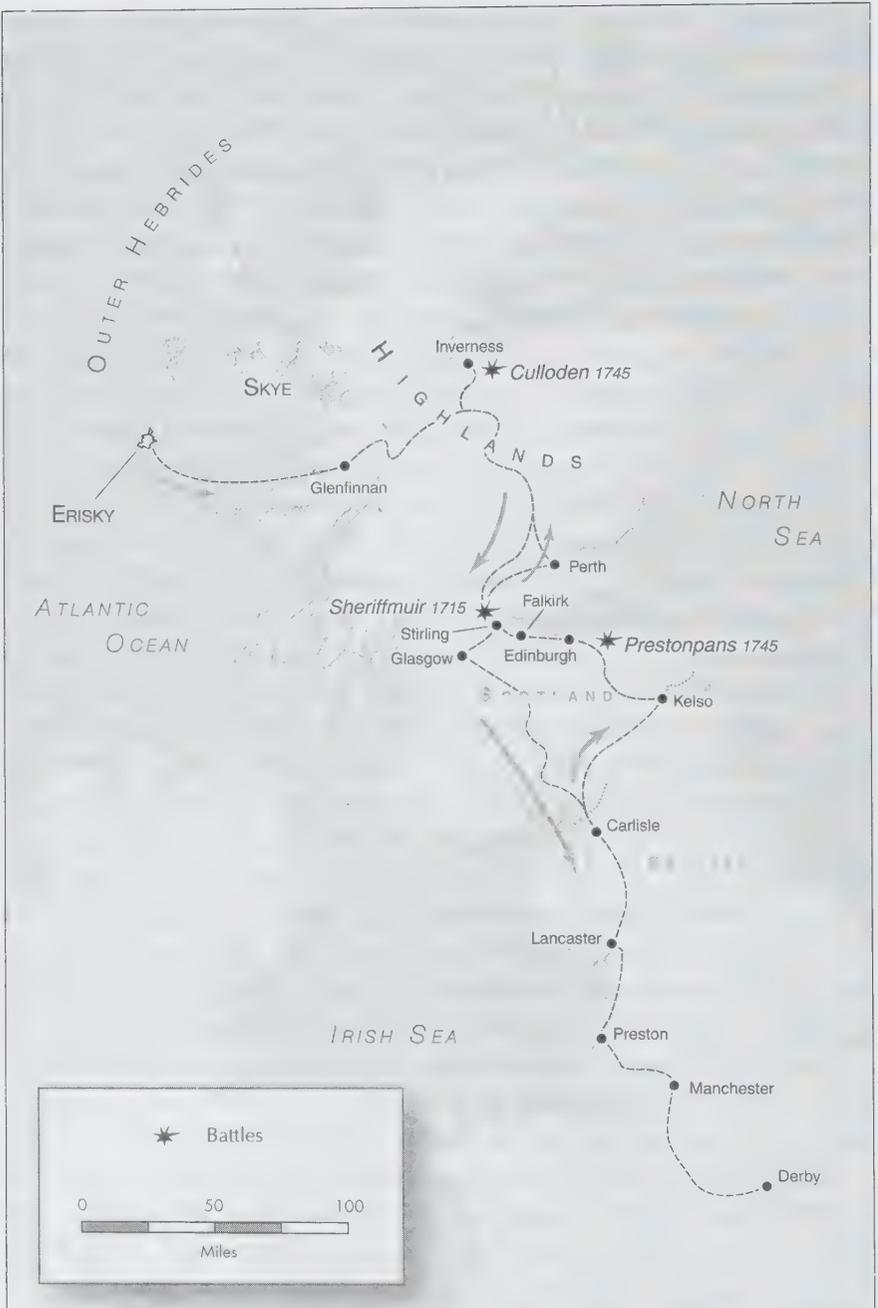
Despite these weaknesses, a major Jacobite rebellion erupted after Queen Anne died and was succeeded by George I. Influenced by Whig slan-

der, George snubbed one of his secretaries of state, the Scotsman John Erskine, earl of Mar, who had in fact helped to bring about the Union. Mar fled to Scotland and raised the standard of James Edward as King James VIII of Scotland (James III to English Jacobites) in August 1715. Partly on the basis of false claims of French support, Mar rapidly assembled a force of about twelve thousand men, mainly Episcopalians from the Northeast of Scotland plus elements of many Highland clans. Not all of the Highland clans came out, however, for the decision as to whether to rebel or support the Hanoverians often depended on the clan chief's position in local feuds and local politics. The Campbells, for instance, supported the Whig regime, as did some great northern clans such as the Sutherlands and the Mackays.

The ordinary clan member, who was the foot soldier of the Highland host, had nothing to do with the decision of his clan to join the fray. The decision was strictly a matter for the clan chief and his immediate family. In the Highland clans, the chief leased land at a low rent to his principal lieutenants, called *tacksmen*, who were often kinsmen of the chief. In return for their land, the tacksmen pledged military service to the chief and in turn subleased their land in small portions to the clansmen who served as the clan troops. Bound by the closest ties of blood, land tenure, and military duty, the tacksmen of a clan had to respond unquestioningly to the call of the chief to go to war, as did the ordinary subtenant soldiers. In relatively short bursts, this clan army would fight with great élan, mobility, and offensive striking power, but it was not suited to long campaigns or defensive warfare.

Mar failed to understand either the opportunities or the limits offered by the Highland army. The Hanoverian forces in Scotland were very weak; had he moved quickly, Mar might well have consolidated Scotland for James Edward and then moved to gather Jacobite forces in England. Certainly the Jacobite army needed quick successes in order to prove to waverers that joining the rebellion was the politically astute thing to do. But Mar, an indecisive commander, failed to take Edinburgh. Finally, the duke of Argyll (head of the Campbells) and his small British army drew Mar into battle at Sheriffmuir in November. Sheriffmuir made a significant difference in Scottish national history. The bloody battle was a draw, but Argyll's troops held the field. Mar's Highlanders began to drift back to their mountain glens.

At this point James Edward arrived from France. He had been given no help by the French government, which was in a cautious mood after the



Jacobite Rebellions. The Battle of Sherrifmuir ended before James Edward, the Old Pretender, landed on Scottish soil. Thirty years later, his son endured longer and fought harder, but in the end fared no better. The map traces the route of the Young Pretender's march into England and his lengthy retreat.

death of Louis XIV earlier in 1715. James Edward was a brave man, but his perpetual gloominess hindered his cause. On his arrival in December, he announced to his officers: “For me, it is no new thing to be unfortunate, since my whole life from my cradle has been a constant series of misfortunes”—hardly a speech to inspire wavering men. The dwindling of Mar’s army continued. Argyll received reinforcements, and in February 1716, James Edward and Mar left for France. Thus ended what was probably the Scots’ best chance of restoring their independence by force.

THE '45

The Stuarts did not stop trying to promote their cause after 1715. Forever involved in intrigue in European courts against the Hanoverian regime, they even managed in 1719 to get Spanish support for an armed expedition to Britain. In this case, as in so many others, the winds blew against the Jacobites, and a storm destroyed much of the Spanish fleet off Corunna. Only a few hundred Spanish troops reached Scotland, and they were soon defeated and their meager clan allies scattered.

The rebellion of 1715 and the abortive invasion of 1719 were of great help to the Whigs in establishing their preeminence *in England*: they could claim that the Tories were unsafe because of their Jacobite associations and that Whig rule was the only alternative to popery and foreign invasion. *In Scotland*, however, Whig efforts to integrate the Highlands with the already anglicized Lowlands and to incorporate both in the British state proceeded fitfully during these years. In the wake of the 1715 rebellion, the Whig government suppressed the titles of about nineteen leading Jacobites and seized a few estates, yet most of the clan chiefs were able to avoid serious punishment. The Jacobite clans simply ignored the Disarming Act of 1716, which prohibited them from possessing a broadsword, gun, or “other warlike weapon.”

Yet anglicization did begin to chip away at the structures of Highland society. The construction of a system of roads proved effective in breaking the isolation of the Highlands and strengthening state control. Under General George Wade, the British army in the 1720s built approximately 260 miles of roadway, penetrating the central Highlands and connecting the British outposts on the Great Glen, Fort William and Fort Augustus, to Inverness. Wade instituted a system of policing the main Highland routes against Jacobites by recruiting Whig clansmen into independent army units (later organized as the famous Black Watch Regiment).

At the same time, a semiofficial educational movement undertaken by the Lowland gentry increased the pressure on traditional Highland society. The Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) was founded in 1709 after the model of the English SPCK to establish Presbyterian schools that would teach “religion and virtue” to Highlanders, who were perceived by many Lowland Scots (and many English) as savages. The SSPCK founders believed that the barbarism of Highland culture stemmed from three mutually supportive factors: Catholicism, the Gaelic language, and Jacobitism. By inculcating Highland children with Calvinist religious doctrines and teaching them the English language, the SSPCK sought to weaken Jacobitism and hasten the integration of the Highlanders into the mainstream of Anglo-Scottish life. The (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland, which had experienced great difficulty in penetrating the Gaelic-speaking areas, supported the SSPCK, and Parliament granted it £20,000 from the revenue raised by the forfeited estates of rebel clansmen. By 1758, the SSPCK had established 176 schools, most of them in the Highlands. Through the SSPCK, one Presbyterian minister proclaimed, “Christianity is increased, Heathenish Customs are abandoned, the number of Papists is diminished, disaffection to the Government is lessened, and the English language is so diffused, that in the remotest glens it is spoken by the young people.”¹ His confidence may have been misplaced: illiteracy rates in the Highland remained among the highest in Europe. Nevertheless, the isolation of Highland culture was dwindling. At the same time, the Highland aristocracy and gentry, who increasingly had to live in both the Gaelic and the anglicized worlds, slowly began to accept the manners and speech of “polite”—that is, English—culture.

The Jacobite revolt of 1745, then, was not the outburst of a vigorous Gaelic society, but the last stand of traditional Highland culture against the forces causing its decline: commercialism, anglicization, and governmental pressure from England and Lowland Scotland. The prosperity and stability of Walpole’s long premiership had made the 1720s and 1730s relatively peaceful in Scotland. But when Britain went to war with Spain in 1739, and France soon after, the opportunity again rose for a Jacobite rebellion in Britain, this time with French help. Charles Edward, son of The Old Pretender and one of the few charismatic figures produced by the Stuarts, saw his opportunity and seized it.

¹Allen, *Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*, 120.

Charles Edward, “The Young Pretender,” or Bonnie Prince Charlie as the Scots called him, was then in his early twenties, none too intelligent, but tall, good-looking, graceful, and chivalrous. Born and reared in the Jacobite court in Rome, he was energetic and ambitious. Early in 1744, Charles went to France in order to persuade the French government to assist the Jacobite enterprise. The French, as usual, were interested in using the Stuarts solely to advance their own interests. As it happened, the French in 1744 were planning an invasion of England, but a storm destroyed the invasion fleet. The French abandoned their invasion plans, turned their attention to the Continent, and left Charles on his own. In 1745, with little help from the French, Charles had two ships fitted out for an expedition to Scotland. Unfortunately for Charles, the British navy intercepted and drove off the larger of the two ships, which carried most of Charles’s troops. The prince, however, persevered and landed in the Outer Hebrides, leading a grand total of seven men.

For some time, Charles had been in contact with the Jacobite clans, but the absence of French troops discouraged most of them from joining him. Only by an emotional appeal to the Highlanders’ sense of personal loyalty was Charles initially able to win any support at all, and that predictably came from the Macdonalds and the Camerons. He boldly set out for the central Highlands and Edinburgh with no more than one thousand men. Luckily for him, the British had stripped Scotland of almost all of its forces, including the new Black Watch regiment. Moreover, the few troops remaining, inexperienced and untrained, were commanded by Sir John Cope, an incompetent officer who threw away what advantages he had by embarking on a long and pointless march to Inverness. Gathering support as he went, Charles moved directly to Edinburgh, which opened its gate to the Jacobites without a fight. Cope shipped his men back to Edinburgh, but arrived too late. Shortly afterward, Charles’s forces attacked Cope’s army at Prestonpans and routed it with a furious Highland charge.

These astonishing events meant that Charles now held all of Scotland except Glasgow and the Southwest. Yet Charles’s army never numbered more than about five thousand Highlanders, and he had no means of actually administering the country. Moreover, the bonnie prince was not content to win Scottish independence; he held true to the Stuart aim of reclaiming *both* crowns. Hence, with his small and restless Highland army, Charles invaded England. In a dramatic march he moved through Carlisle and Manchester as far south as Derby, only 130 miles from London. The British



The Battle of Culloden, by D. Morier (April 1746). This painting shows the desperation of the struggle when the Highland charge met the British lines. The Jacobite clans suffered total defeat.

government panicked, and George II prepared to return to Hanover. In fact, however, Charles's advance had not brought out any significant *English* Jacobite support. After a heated argument with his commanders, Charles was prevailed upon to retreat to Scotland.

The long retreat was disastrous for the Jacobite army. The Highlanders' morale dwindled, and desertions increased. Behind them came a large, well-supplied, and methodical army led by William, duke of Cumberland, George II's enormously fat but capable son. The two forces met at Culloden, on a boggy field ill-suited to the impetuous Highlanders' mode of combat. The miserably cold and starving Highlanders endured a fearful pounding by the British artillery before they could stand no more and charged. This time the British troops knew what to expect from a Highland attack. The result was a complete defeat for the Jacobite army and the slaughter of the Highlanders. Led from the field, Charles said only, "Let every man seek his own safety the best way he can." On the run across the Highlands for five months, Charles took shelter with loyal clansmen. His adventures gave rise to many a romantic legend, but the Jacobite movement was shattered. Charles returned to France in September 1746 and spent the rest of his life in futile attempts to revive the Jacobite cause. He died in Rome in 1788; by

then the British had ceased to worry about Jacobitism and the no longer very bonny prince.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CLANS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE HIGHLANDS

The Battle of Culloden itself was a severe blow to the Highland clans, but British policies after Culloden did even more lasting damage. The duke of Cumberland pursued the remnants of the clan army with ruthless persistence. This pursuit, which earned Cumberland the nickname “Butcher Billy,” was a matter of official policy, a concerted effort to reduce the power of the Highlanders so that they could never again sponsor a Jacobite rebellion. Lord Chesterfield, the elegant exponent of worldly manners and lord lieutenant of Ireland, in fact urged a policy of genocide on Cumberland—capture the chiefs, massacre the peasantry, and eradicate the clans. Cumberland and his successors did not go that far, but their activities were thorough enough. British troops deliberately ravaged clan estates all through 1746, burning crops, destroying cottages, driving off cattle, and smashing tools. Any rebel captured with weapons was shot outright. Most ordinary clan soldiers who surrendered were transported to the colonies as indentured workers. About 120 Scottish Jacobite officers were executed.

These brutal acts were only the opening efforts at destroying the Highland way of life. The British forts in the Highlands were strengthened, Wade’s system of military roads vastly expanded, and military patrols extended and increased. Law and order came to the Highlands with an iron hand. In 1746 Parliament passed another Disarming Act, forbidding the Highlanders to carry or possess arms or to wear Highland dress (that is, the tartan and plaid). The act even banned the bagpipe as a warlike instrument. The British state seized a substantial number of estates belonging to clan chiefs, and this time (unlike in 1715) allowed no legalistic evasion of forfeiture. Most important, the claims of the chiefs over their tenants that had made the clans such potent military units were broken. The abolition of military tenures and the clan chiefs’ judicial powers ensured that the landlord-tenant relationship in the Highlands came to resemble that prevailing in England. Now the chief was no longer prosecutor, judge, and jury in his territory, and Scottish gentry and tenantry had access to courts established by the central government. Legal administration in Scotland was brought into line with English policies, though Scottish law itself remained separate.

The English (and many Lowland Scots) had long regarded the Highlanders as primitives, prone to rebellion and lawlessness. To tame these supposed barbarians, the British government sought to inculcate Highland culture with English-style efficiency and industriousness. Military discipline provided one avenue. Recruited for new regiments in the British army, thousands of Highland clansmen—themselves the targets of English imperialism—played a vital role in the expansion of the Empire. The British state also attempted to use the forfeited Jacobite estates as models of improved farming along a corridor of land thirty to forty miles wide from Stirling to Inverness. All rents here were to be used for “civilising the Inhabitants upon the said Estates and other Parts of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, thus promoting amongst them the Protestant religion, good Government, Industry and Manufactures, and the Principles of Duty and Loyalty to his Majesty, his Heirs and Successors.” Gradually, however, the government lost interest in the scheme as fear of Jacobitism died out, and by 1784 the estates had returned to private hands.

It was the landlords of the Scottish Highlands, not the British state, who largely completed the destruction of the clans. In increasing numbers since the beginning of the eighteenth century, Highland chiefs sent their sons to be educated in the Lowlands so that they could acquire the polish (and the language) of the polite world. Inevitably, some of the values of that world rubbed off on them. After Culloden, these semi-anglicized chiefs faced a choice of trying to sustain the traditional Highland culture against overwhelming odds or converting themselves into landlords along English (or Lowland) lines. During the century after 1750, most clan chiefs opted for the latter route, sometimes reluctantly, often intermittently, but inexorably nonetheless. By this slow trend—as much a nineteenth as an eighteenth-century development—the clan chiefs transformed themselves into English-style great landlords and in the process severed the close personal and patriarchal bonds that had knitted the clans together.

The landlords called this transformation *improvement*, a resonant term that captures perfectly the optimism in human endeavor and scientific rationality that characterized eighteenth-century Enlightened thought. Highland landlords sought not only to increase their own profits, but also to replace what they regarded as inefficient, unproductive, and irrational agricultural practices with progressive, scientific techniques. They consolidated the holdings on their estates (as was being done in England and in the Lowlands through enclosure), eliminated the tacksmen as intermediary tenants, and leased the parcels of land directly to the highest bidder, often

someone from outside the community. Some landlords saw the tacksmen, subtenants, and cottagers who stood in their way merely as obstacles to be removed. Others, however, were genuinely horrified by the poverty and vulnerability to recurrent famine that characterized Highland society. By establishing a more sustainable economy, they believed they would improve the lives of the ordinary people who resided on their lands—as well, of course, as their own incomes.

No matter what the motivation of the landlords, the fact remains that what came to be called the *Highland Clearances* constituted the destruction of an entire way of life—in some cases, achieved with astonishing rapidity. Sheep figure largely in the story of the Clearances. As wool prices climbed steadily in the second half of the eighteenth century, “improving” landlords discovered that sheep meant profit. To make room for sheep, they ordered the removal of entire communities to coastal regions. There, the improvers proclaimed, displaced tenants would shrug off their traditional way of life and evolve into modern, productive wage laborers in the linen, fishing, and kelp-burning (alkali) industries.

Few of the dispossessed regarded the Clearances as improvement. Suddenly evicted from land that they had long regarded as their communal inheritance, they now had to learn entirely new skills to survive in a harsh new environment. The infertile and overcrowded coastal regions proved unable to sustain the new populations, and all the optimistic plans to develop the Highlands as a manufacturing region crumbled. In the nineteenth century, an increasing number of landlords abandoned resettlement programs and instead simply forced their tenants off their lands.

Thus the improvement policies drove tens of thousands of Highlanders to emigrate—to the Lowlands, to England, and to North America and Australia. In the late 1760s and early 1770s, for example, about twenty thousand Scotsmen, most of them Highlanders, left for America. In the early phases of the Clearances, tacksmen often organized the substantial tenant families on the estate to emigrate with them, leaving the poorest peasants to stay on. By the later decades, emigrants were often extremely poor. In many cases, landlords arranged the emigration—at times forcibly.

Ordinary Highlanders did not simply acquiesce in this eradication of their traditional way of life. Villagers petitioned against eviction, sought legal and political redress, refused to vacate their homes, and at times turned violent, taunting eviction officers, pelting them with mud and stones, and assaulting them. Women led these charges—in part because they played such an essential role in the household economy and in part

because both sides assumed that men would be less likely to hurt women. (In a number of cases, however, constables did not hesitate to bludgeon women with their batons.) Frequently, Highlanders turned against the creatures that seemed to be the fundamental cause of their woes: the sheep. Sheep maiming and killing were commonplace, and in 1792—the Year of the Sheep—tenants across the northern Highlands rose up in spontaneous mass rebellion that focused on driving all sheep out of the region. The sheep, however, stayed. The rebels did not.

The Highland Clearances took place over the course of more than a century and, as historian T. M. Devine has shown, “gradual and relentless displacement, rather than mass eviction, was the norm.”² Nevertheless, the wholesale removal of entire communities so traumatized Highland culture that such mass evictions came to symbolize the Clearances as a whole. Moreover, as is always the case in popular memory, the most notorious and dramatic cases (by definition, the atypical) are those that are recalled the most frequently. Thus the early nineteenth-century Sutherland clearances have most deeply etched themselves in folk memory. A great “improver,” the Countess of Sutherland sought to remake her vast but debt-ridden estate in the northern Highlands into a showpiece of the benefits of Enlightenment rationality and capitalist economics. As her estate manager put it, “it will be a blessing to a great proportion of [the people] to be taught a new and improved application of their industry and labour.”³ To make room for sheep, the countess’s agents expelled about ten thousand people and burned many of the cottages to prevent tenants from reoccupying their farms. In at least one instance, they set fire to a house with the occupant still inside; in many more cases, they forced elderly and sick people out into the cold. One Sutherlander recalled “the cries of the women and children, the roaring of the affrighted cattle, hunted at the same time by the yelling dogs of the shepherds amid the smoke and fire.”⁴

The Highland Clearances offer a particularly concentrated version of the way in which industrial capitalism wore away traditional, customary, agrarian practices and relationships. Episodic clearances continued through the 1850s, but the signs were already clear for Dr. Johnson to read when he visited the Highlands in the 1770s:

²Devine, *Clanship to Crofter's War*, 37.

³Richards, *The Highland Clearances*, 126

⁴Donald Macleod, *Gloomy Memories in the Highlands* (Glasgow: Sinclair, 1892).

There was perhaps never any change of national manners so quick, so great, and so general, as that which has operated in the Highlands by the last conquest and subsequent laws. We came hither too late to see what we expected—a people of peculiar appearance and a system of antiquated life. The clans retain little now of their original character: their ferocity of temper is softened, their military ardour is extinguished, their dignity of independence is depressed, their contempt of government subdued, and their reverence for their chiefs abated. Of what they had before the late conquest of their country there remains only their language and their poverty.

DEVELOPMENTS IN LOWLAND SCOTLAND

In sharp contrast to the turbulence and tragedy that marked the history of the Highlands in the eighteenth century, Lowland Scotland embarked on a period of prosperity and stability. Although the period immediately following the Union did not bring the predicted economic benefits, by the 1740s, the Scottish economy began to show signs of progress. In widening circles of the Lowlands, agricultural improvers were introducing new crops, new farming techniques, and new financial management. Perhaps more important, the urban commercial economy of the Lowlands developed relatively rapidly. Linen and woolen manufacturing, hit hard by competition from more modernized and productive English firms in the early eighteenth century, rebounded. Fishing, too, became an important export industry, with sales of herring, salmon, and cod all generating significant revenue.

Scotland's commercial expansion was most pronounced in Edinburgh and Glasgow, which, however, developed in very different ways. Edinburgh, the largest city in Britain except London and Bristol, was no longer the capital of an independent country, but it became the administrative and legal center of "North Britain." Professional people dominated the town, and lawyers were by far the most influential and prosperous professional group. Glasgow, in contrast, was a commercial center, and by 1801, the largest city in Scotland. Its traders and merchants aggressively took advantage of the new market of England and its empire opened to them by the Union. Linen manufacturing, sugar refining, and shipping all became important Glasgow trades. The tobacco trade with North America became the most important of all: already by the 1730s Glasgow's merchants had claimed a large share of this vital trade. By 1771, the Scots were importing forty-seven million pounds of tobacco a year, most of it into Glasgow, and the Scots had won 52 percent of all British trade in tobacco. Wealthy "tobacco lords" inspired much of Glasgow's bustling import/export trade and injected a great amount of liquid capital into the Scottish economy.

The commercialization of the Scottish economy did not mean that Scotland's landed elite lost its economic, social, or political preeminence. The eighteenth century was, in Scotland as much as in England, a golden age for the landed order. At the highest levels, the Scottish aristocracy merged into the British ruling class; like their English counterparts, Scottish nobility built graceful country homes on their estates, maintained townhomes in London, and used the London *season* as a marriage market for their offspring.

Scottish lairds and bonnet lairds, however, were more likely to converge on Edinburgh or Glasgow for a smaller scale Scottish version of the season, where they intermingled and intermarried with the upper levels of Scotland's flourishing middle orders. Glasgow's tobacco lords were only the most visible of the merchant captains who made spectacular fortunes from the opportunities offered by imperial trade. Military service, too, offered social mobility to ambitious young men from professional as well as landed families. By the 1790s, Scotsmen accounted for more than one-quarter of all officers in Britain's line infantry battalions. Moreover, as we will see below, scholars, printers, scientists, writers, and artists also prospered in this period, in conjunction with Scotland's prominent position in the European Enlightenment. Lower down the social scale, urban prosperity meant widening chances and choices for all sorts of tradesmen and women—shoemakers and shopkeepers, hatters and hoteliers, butchers and bakers, tailors and tinkers, and on and on. As in England, the growing prosperity fostered greater sex segregation, with more women in the professional and propertied levels of society withdrawing from economic production into the domestic sphere.

Yet Scottish women possessed, at least in legal terms, some distinct advantages over their sisters to the south. The English principle of *coverture*, whereby a woman lost legal personhood upon marriage, did not apply in Scottish law; Scottish women, therefore could make contracts, sue and be sued, and bequeath property. Moreover, under Scottish law, a woman's *paraphernalia*—her clothing and jewelry—remained her personal property even after marriage; this right offered Scottish wives a degree of financial protection not yet available in England. When a Scottish marriage broke down, moreover, divorce did not require an act of Parliament as it did in England, and Scottish women could sue for divorce on the same grounds—adultery or desertion—as men. Patriarchy remained fundamental to Scottish marriage and family relations, but both the Scottish legal concept of marriage as a divine contract and the deeply embedded Presbyterian fear of

tyranny fostered the ideal (although certainly not always the reality) that a man had a religious duty to care for and love his wife.

Religion continued to play a central role, not only in Scottish law, but also in Scottish life. Religious debates and doctrinal disputes remained fierce, although the age of religious warfare had thankfully ended. As we have already noted, the Patronage Act of 1712 stabbed at the very heart of Presbyterianism by granting the right to place ministers in parish appointments not to the kirk session but to lay patrons, such as large landowners and the Crown itself. Not surprisingly, clergymen tended to promote the interests of the patrons to whom they owed their livings. As a result, ministers in the established Church of Scotland more and more resembled their Anglican counterparts in England: gentlemen-scholars whose primary interest was in upholding the political and social order. The spreading practice of *laird's lofts*—specially reserved pew sections for the landed elite—reflected this tendency to see the church as a bastion of rather than a challenge to the ways of the world.

Yet not all Presbyterian clerics submitted to the new realities of lay patronage. In the Secessions of 1733 and 1761, Presbyterian ministers led their people out of the established church and into the ranks of Dissent. By the end of the century, the numbers of dissenting Presbyterians rivaled those in the established church in many villages. Although the issue of patronage remained central, doctrinal divisions also emerged, with Dissenting Presbyterians more inclined to preserve Calvinist rigor and a strict morality and to reject the Enlightenment stress on science rather than divine revelation as the source of absolute truth.

THE SCOTTISH ENLIGHTENMENT

Considering its small population (approximately 1,200,000 in 1750) and its record of rebellion and war, eighteenth-century Scotland hardly seems to be a country capable of giving rise to a renaissance in high culture. Yet that is precisely what happened. In the second half of the century, Scotland produced a galaxy of intellectuals and artists to equal any in the European world. Social philosophers such as Francis Hutcheson, Adam Ferguson, David Hume, and Adam Smith; scientists such as Joseph Black; architects such as William and Robert Adam; and painters such as Allan Ramsay and Henry Raeburn established Scotland as a center of the European Enlightenment. The French Enlightenment thinker Voltaire proclaimed, “It is from Scotland that we receive rules of taste in all the arts.” Or as Scottish

philosopher David Hume put it, “Really it is admirable how many Men of Genius this Country produces at present.”⁵

How can we explain this remarkable cultural efflorescence in a small nation that in the seventeenth century was seen as economically backward and in the early eighteenth century lost its separate political identity? What was the connection of the cultural renaissance to the union with England and the destruction of the clans? Such questions are not easy to answer and to a degree at least must remain a matter of speculation. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to say that this particular cultural flowering was the result not of any nationalistic reaction *against* the union or of a nostalgic defense of Highland values, but of a solid *joining* of the Lowlands to the wider English economy and culture. Enlightened thought in Scotland, as elsewhere, was urbane, cosmopolitan, and secular. It drew on old cultural connections between Scotland and Continental Europe. One of the preconditions that had to exist before the Enlightenment could take root anywhere was an end to isolation and the forging of links to the wider cultural world. The union helped to create this for Scotland. Similarly, Enlightened ideas could flourish only in conditions of political stability. Here, too, the union with England was important because English power ended the incessant strife between Highlands and Lowlands and installed Lowland values and styles of life in a preeminent position.

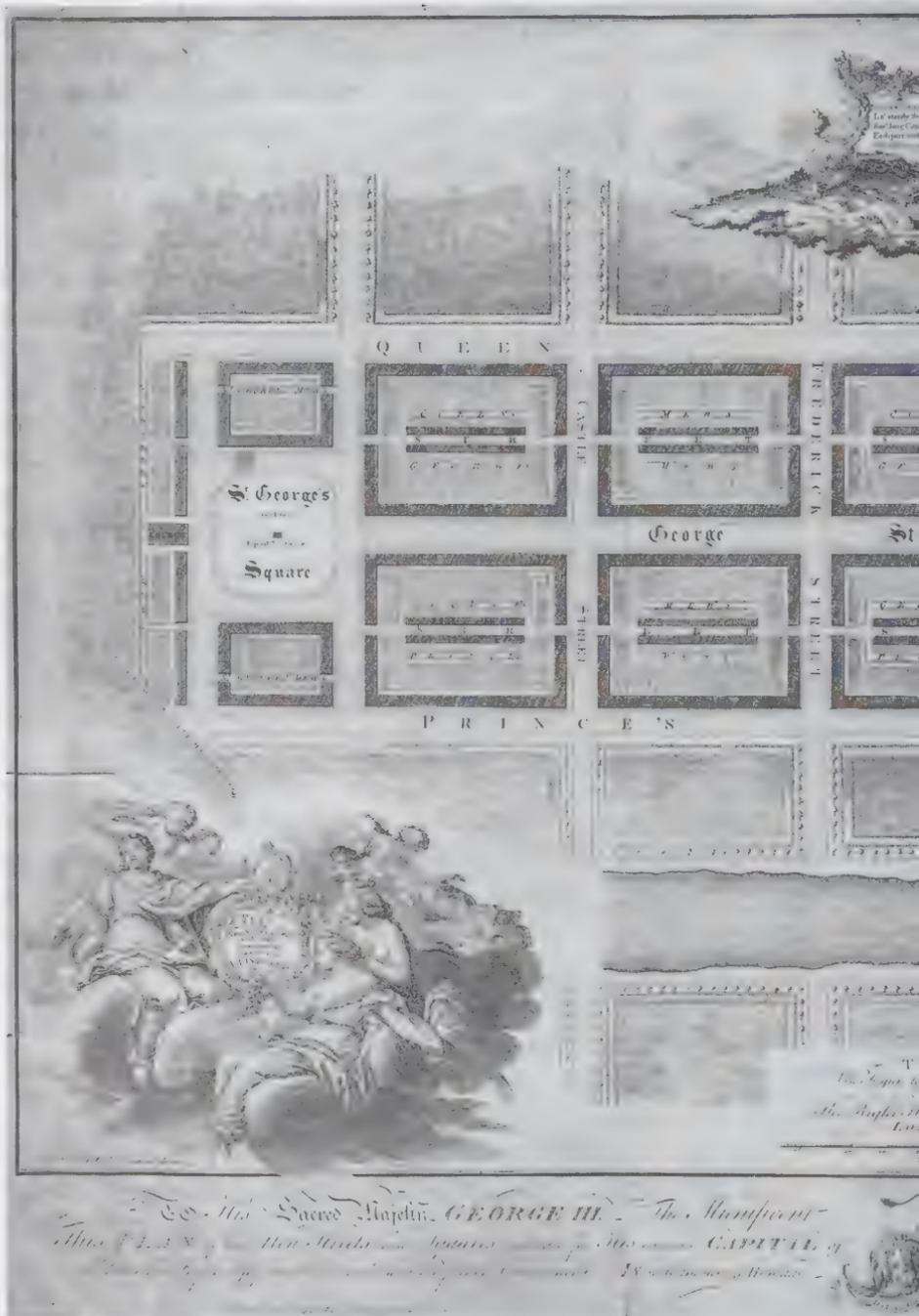
Other important preconditions include (1) sufficient economic prosperity, (2) adequate institutional support, and (3) an absence of intellectual or religious restrictions. Each of these conditions came to exist in the urban centers of Lowland Scotland by the middle decades of the eighteenth century. We have seen that, by the 1740s, Scotland possessed both the commercial vibrancy and the urban culture to sustain its Enlightenment. In Edinburgh, especially, the interconnected professional and landed elites generated a lively intellectual life of legal philosophizing, political talk, and social thought. They were also largely responsible for the building of New Town, the elegantly classical district that made Edinburgh the “Athens of the North,” one of the great monuments of eighteenth-century taste. Laid out on a grid, with standard roof lines, paved roads, a sewer system, and wide sidewalks to allow room for leisured strolls conducive to polite conversation, Edinburgh’s New Town embodied Enlightenment values.

⁵Allen, *Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*, 126.

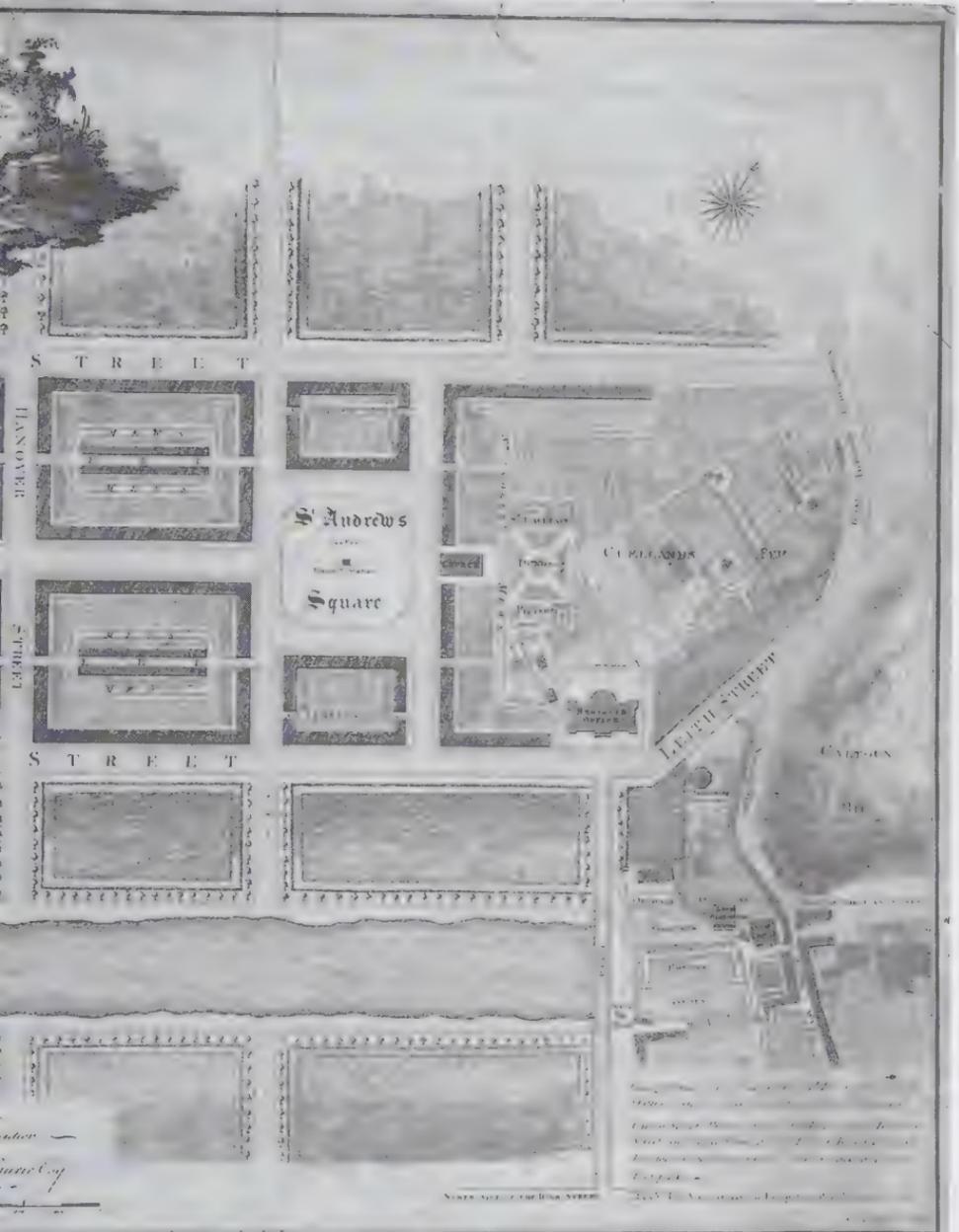
Institutional support for the Scottish Enlightenment came from Scotland's reformed universities. Because of the kirk's tradition of establishing a school in every parish, Lowland Scotland had a higher literacy rate than England, and boys from the commercial and professional ranks regularly attended one of the four universities: Edinburgh, Glasgow, St. Andrews, and Aberdeen. In the eighteenth century, the Scottish universities grew in size and (unlike Oxford and Cambridge, which remained shackled to classics and mathematics) expanded the range of subjects taught to include law, medicine, rhetoric, and the natural sciences. In addition, the mode of teaching changed, and the Scottish universities became famous for teachers who lectured in English (rather than Latin) in their specialized subjects. The leader in this teaching reform was Francis Hutcheson, professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow from 1729, through whose classes many of the leaders of the Scottish Enlightenment passed.

Finally, developments in the Church of Scotland were crucial to the country's intellectual life. If the kirk had remained the oppressive, puritanical institution of the seventeenth century, then the secular, tolerant thought that was central to the Enlightenment would have been stifled. But slowly from the 1690s on, the theological temperature of the kirk went down. For instance, the last execution for blasphemy in Scotland occurred in 1696 and the last for witchcraft in 1727; the laws against witchcraft were repealed in 1736. By the 1750s, the Moderate party—tolerant, reasonable, and respectable—came to preeminence in the kirk and the universities. On the key Scottish religious issue of the century, the question of lay patronage, the Moderate party sided with the state: patronage ensured the appointments of reasonable men like themselves. Many Moderates abandoned the Calvinism of traditional Scottish Protestantism for a more pragmatic, this-worldly religion that stressed the possibilities of human progress rather than the need for divine redemption.

The concerns of the Moderate *literati* of the Church of Scotland reflected the main themes of Scottish Enlightened thought. Scottish Calvinists had always been preoccupied with individual moral reformation and with the associated social discipline; now, in the more sociable spirit of the eighteenth century, leading Scottish thinkers turned to the issue of the moral improvement of human beings in society. Like Locke and the English moralists, these Scots assumed that human beings are naturally social beings and therefore that moral progress is to be understood in the context of social institutions—legal, political, and religious. They were among the first social scientists. Furthermore, the Scottish thinkers all believed that



Edinburgh New Town. This early nineteenth-century map shows Edinburgh's New Town, an embodiment of Enlightenment rationality and order. The straight,



wide walkways encouraged "polite" conversation and the numerous parks offered a vision of nature tamed and transformed for human benefit.

Scotland was emerging from an age of barbarism into an age of civilization; thus, they focused on the *history* of various societies by which they could measure Scotland's progress. Like all Enlightened thinkers, they assumed that human nature is everywhere the same and that the purpose of moral philosophy and history is to discover the universal laws of human behavior. Therefore, philosophical history—history as the record of the fundamental laws of nature—was their characteristic mode of thinking.

Next to David Hume, whose work has already been examined in connection with British empiricism (see chapter 5), the greatest thinker in the Scottish Enlightenment was Adam Smith. Smith's work is best understood in the context of *preindustrial* Enlightened thought. Later, his work was taken to be the bible of industrialism, which it emphatically was not, for Smith had little or no experience with factories and steam power; his world was that of Lowland Scottish commerce. Born in 1723 in the small port of Kirkcaldy, Smith was the son of a lawyer and customs official. He attended Glasgow University, where he learned much from the lectures of Francis Hutcheson. Later, he studied at Oxford, which he found to be mostly asleep. He read widely in Enlightenment thought and was especially impressed by the works of Locke, Newton, Hutcheson, and Hume. In 1751, he succeeded Hutcheson at Glasgow University, where he taught natural theology, ethics, jurisprudence, and political economy.

Smith hoped to do for the whole field of moral philosophy what Newton had done for natural science: to construct a new understanding of the entire moral and social universe. In his first important work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Smith gave a systematic, "scientific" treatment of human nature based on two key assumptions: first, that people are motivated by "self-love"—that is, they pursue pleasure and avoid pain—and second, that people are by nature social animals and have a natural faculty of sympathetic behavior. What truly brings pleasure, Smith reasoned, is the approval of others: "It is not wealth that men desire, but the consideration and good opinion that wait upon riches." By exercising the power of sympathetic imagination, individuals know what others approve. A person therefore behaves as if there is an "impartial spectator," or conscience, watching every move. Through the operation of this fundamental quality of human nature, Smith contended, our pursuit of self-interest leads to socially benevolent behavior as if by an "invisible hand."

This was the moral foundation of Smith's *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), one of the most influential works in modern Western history. In it, Smith set out a theory of self-regulating

economics, but his moral theory always stood in the background. *The Wealth of Nations* reflects the Scottish interest in how societies progress. Its basic framework, therefore, is philosophical history. Smith believed that nations go through four stages of development: hunting, pastoral, agricultural, and commercial. In each age, the mode of production shapes the political and social institutions. The division of labor characterizes the commercial stage: according to the principle of self-interest, each person (and each nation) takes up what he or she (or it) does best. In this way, production is maximized provided that nothing (such as the state) interferes with the natural operation of the market and the division of labor. Smith thus argued for the *utility* of natural liberty because any intervention by the state in the economy by definition deflects people from natural behavior and maximum production.

Smith's economic theories challenged the prevailing economic orthodoxy: *mercantilism*. Although most fully developed and implemented in France, mercantilism shaped economic policy throughout eighteenth-century Europe. Mercantilists argued that the power of the state depends on national wealth, and that the wealth of a nation depends primarily on its holdings in precious metals such as gold and silver. To maximize these holdings, then, the state must regulate and protect the nation's commerce—through tariffs on imports, the establishment of trade monopolies and overseas colonies, the use of naval and military power to protect trading interests, and a host of other economic activities. Smith's belief in the utility of natural liberty led him to reject the economically active state demanded by mercantilism and instead to advocate *laissez-faire* domestic policies and free trade between nations. Yet Smith was never the proponent of dog-eat-dog competition, and he expressed concern that the routinization of work resulting from the division of labor would dull the wits and imagination of the laborer. He imagined that the invisible hand of benevolence would work to keep the self-regulating economic system he advocated from being vicious and exploitive. In this way, Smith expressed the confidence and reasonableness of Lowland Scotland as it claimed the benefits of joining the prosperous and expansive English society.

Smith's faith in economic exchange was also part of the wider Enlightenment belief in the virtues of intellectual exchange. Just as the free trade of goods would lead to greater prosperity and thus material progress, so the free trade of ideas would guarantee intellectual progress. Through conversation, whether in coffeehouses or on Edinburgh sidewalks or in the pages of the many eighteenth-century periodicals, Enlightenment thinkers

throughout Britain sought to nurture a rational approach to living and learning that would, they believed, lead to social betterment.

A great achievement by *Scottish* intellectuals fostered in specifically *Scottish* institutions, the Scottish Enlightenment nevertheless contributed to the formation of a *British* nation. As we saw, the Union of 1707 created a British *state*, but not an integrated British people. The English in the eighteenth century aggressively eradicated that part of Scottish culture they regarded as dangerous to Britain, but they showed no interest in building an emotional bond between Englishmen and Scots or in blending the two peoples. Still, the long, slow process of integration into Britain did begin for the Scots in the eighteenth century. The incorporation of clansmen into the British army was one major integrative force, as was the participation of Scotsmen in the administration of foreign and imperial affairs, an arena in which Britain did function as a single unit. At the same time, the market economy tied the Scots tightly to English commerce and industry, while the long series of wars against the French inspired a sense of British rather than more narrowly English or Scottish patriotism. In addition, there was the common Protestantism that most Scots shared with the English.

Finally, and not least importantly, the Scottish Enlightenment brought Scottish thinkers and writers into intimate relationship with the mainstream of English intellectual life. Enlightened Scottish thinkers such as Hume and Smith, along with the books they wrote, moved easily among Edinburgh, Glasgow, and London. Empirical ideas, which were cosmopolitan rather than provincial, became the common property of minds on both sides of the River Tweed. Significantly, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, a splendid embodiment of Enlightenment faith in fact gathering and the exchange of information, began in 1768, not in London, but in Edinburgh. A sphere of intellectual discourse grew up during the 1700s that was genuinely British and that helped Scottish men and women develop parallel identities, Scottish and British.

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Chapter 7

The Expansion of British Power and Empire, 1715–1763

By the end of the War of Spanish Succession (1713), Britain had become a major European power. Between 1715 and 1763, Britain became a genuine world power as well, not only ranking among the half-dozen strongest European states, but also holding an empire larger and richer than any other in the Western world. Thus, in the first half of the eighteenth century, Britain began to assume a global role that it held until the mid-twentieth century. The expansion of British power was to have a great impact on the lives of ordinary Britons—Scots, Welsh, Irish, and English—and of millions of other peoples around the world as well. By any accounting it was a remarkable achievement for such a relatively small group of islands off the shore of Europe.

How did British power in the eighteenth century expand so rapidly? No one could have predicted it in 1550 or even 1650. World-power status was not the goal of any deliberate, unified British plan, except in the sense that Britain, like all European states of the eighteenth century, sought incessantly to aggrandize itself at the expense of others. Britain's position of power on the Continent and overseas came as the by-product of a century-long struggle with France (only half over by 1763) and the expansion of British trade. These two mutually reinforcing factors were rooted in the general economic prosperity and political security of eighteenth-century Britain.

THE EUROPEAN STATE SYSTEM

The British ascended to world power in the context of an extremely competitive system of European states. Spain's great century of wealth and power had come to an end, and a long war with French absolutism had

exhausted the Dutch Republic. France, with more than 20 million people and a peacetime army of 150,000, remained the leading state in Europe, but it no longer dominated as it had before 1715. The Hapsburg Monarchy (also called Austria-Hungary) and Russia were enormous empires, but economically underdeveloped. In the first half of the eighteenth century, then, Britain and Prussia were the two up-and-coming states in Europe.

Prussia had a population of only 2.25 million (less than Ireland), no naturally defensible borders, and meager resources, yet the ruling Hohenzollern family had made this northern German state into a great power by building an army of enormous size (80,000 men in 1750) and by enforcing exemplary training. Almost the entire Prussian state apparatus was devoted to raising and maintaining the army. In contrast, Britain operated under the handicap of the landowners' fear of a standing army. Nevertheless, the British navy, an effective tax-collecting machinery, and the taxable wealth of the country (including now Wales, Scotland, and Ireland) made Britain a power to contend with. The British navy had shown its supremacy in the wars against Louis XIV, and British governments thereafter maintained it fairly consistently. Parliament's ability to tax the whole of the British Isles made it possible for Britain not only to maintain the navy (which supported the bountifully taxable overseas trade), but also to subsidize the armies of Continental allies. Britain could fight for itself on the seas and pay others to fight for it on land.

Different as they were, European states in the eighteenth century conducted their diplomacy and warfare with broadly similar objectives. In all of them, governments took foreign policy as their primary concern, and the people who made foreign policy were a tiny elite consisting of the monarch and his or her aristocratic advisers. This was true even of Britain, although Parliament and public opinion could on occasion make themselves felt in foreign affairs. The mind-set of all the European governing elites held that the *increase of state power* was what counted in foreign affairs. The age of religious wars had largely passed, and the age of ideological wars had not yet arrived. What mattered to eighteenth-century policymakers was adding to state power by increases in territory, population, and trade, all of which enabled a state to support a larger army and win yet more resources. Hence, the state system of eighteenth-century Europe was a Machiavellian world of rapacious power and violence with no end beyond power itself.

The economic theory of *mercantilism* both explained and motivated this mentality of incessant competition and war. It constituted an elegant circular theory worthy of the rationalistic age in which it was born: quite

simply, trade engenders wealth, wealth supports armies and navies. armies and navies increase state power, and state power expands trade. European statesmen saw commerce as a means of increasing the strength of the state, merchants saw state power as a means of increasing commerce, and both saw warfare as a handy means to both political and commercial ends.

Eighteenth-century wars tended to be limited conflicts. The goal, after all, was not to obliterate an opposing political or social system. (England's wars in Ireland and Scotland, where the existence of the regime itself was at stake, were significant exceptions.) The object of commanders was to conduct campaigns of limited engagements, bloody and terrible to the troops involved, but meant to gain finite advantages that could be useful at the bargaining table. Pieces of territory, trading stations, fortifications, and colonies were all power resources that made up the coinage of the state system, its warfare, and its treaties.

Military technology also restrained the scale of military conflict. In this era, infantry troops carrying flintlock muskets became the dominant force on the battlefield. Especially when used with the newly invented ring bayonet (which turned a musket into a pike), muskets could defeat cavalry troops and were regarded as more important than the artillery, long disdained by aristocratic officers. But muskets were inaccurate and slow to load and fire (three rounds per minute at best); hence, they were most effective when used by massed troops to deliver murderous volleys at close range. Such tactics required elaborate maneuvering and iron discipline on the part of the infantry, both acquired only after lengthy training according to rigid drill. As a result, the best armies were *professional* armies rather than feudal levies or militia because professionals trained full time. Professional armies, however, became so precious that kings and generals hesitated to commit them to a protracted war.

BRITISH INTERESTS AND POWER

In order to see how British interests operated within the European state system, it is important to understand how British policymakers perceived these interests. First, British statesmen (almost all of them English) assumed that what was good for England was good for the rest of the British Isles; hence, they pursued *English* interests with the resources of all of Britain and Ireland—which in turn meant that the very unity of the new state of Great Britain was *the* fundamental English interest. Second, the Whig oligarchs believed that the Hanoverian—that is, Protestant—

succession was crucial to British unity, independence, liberty, and prosperity. As we saw in chapter 6, however, both the state and the Protestant succession came under the pressure of Jacobite risings supported by foreign powers. Jacobitism, therefore, had vital implications for British foreign affairs, among them continual suspicion and hostility toward the Catholic powers Spain and France and alliance in one form or another with the Protestant Dutch Republic.

Third, because George I and II were not only kings of Britain but also electors of Hanover, they insisted on viewing the independence and integrity of their little German state as a British interest. This matter was never popular among the British, for it involved them in expensive entanglements that seemed secondary to purely British concerns. Hanover was rightly thought of as a hostage to French or Hapsburg or Prussian power. As Lord Chesterfield wrote in 1742, "Hanover robs us of the Benefit of being an Island, and is actually a pledge for our good Behaviour on the Continent." Finally, because the British government was keenly aware that its global power derived in large part from overseas commerce rather than military might, trade bulked even larger in the aggregate of British interests than in other European countries. British officials felt particularly sensitive about maintaining access to the Dutch ports, through which British goods entered the Continent, and about sustaining trade in the Baltic, from which Britain imported naval stores, spars, and masts.

Two additional aims, both resulting from an unconscious process of elevating means into ends, also factored into British policymaking. One was the pursuit of a balance of power in Europe. This strategy, which was to be long honored in British policy, first emerged during the wars against Louis XIV, as William III and Marlborough constructed alliances to counter French might. The notion was that Britain should not seek permanent alliances, but should throw its weight into the balance of nations in order to check any one power (usually France) that seemed to be achieving dominance over Europe. By the 1720s and 1730s, many English statesmen regarded this policy as an end in itself.

The second, and somewhat contradictory concern, was simply to oppose France at every turn. By 1713, Britain had been at war with France for twenty-five years, and most Englishmen habitually assumed that this rivalry was somehow natural and that Britain should always range itself against France. Thus, in the eighteenth century, Britons began to equate the French national character with popery, poverty, wooden shoes, unmanly groveling



F. W. Fairholt, John Bull smoking, with cornucopia, roast beef, ale, and his dog. A nineteenth-century image of John Bull as the epitome of British prosperity and strength.

before aristocracy, and frog eating. British patriotism, expressed in stirring songs such as “God Save the King,” “Rule Britannia,” and “Hearts of Oak,” all of which date from the decades before 1760, came to mean all the things the French allegedly lacked: honesty, independence, forthrightness, endurance, John Bull (the sturdy cartoon symbol of England), and the roast beef of Old England.

In pursuit of these interests, Britain could deploy impressive and durable strengths: the army, navy, trade and finance, and colonies. Britain’s position as an island enabled it to get maximum effect from a professional army large enough only to drain French resources away from its own navy. Younger sons of aristocratic families provided the officers; the dregs of society,

recruited by patriotism, poverty, or alcohol, supplied the enlisted ranks. The heaviest expenditures went to the navy, which was the best-led and largest in Europe (normally more than one hundred ships) and backed by a very large merchant marine. Parliament, as we have seen, served as an excellent taxing machine, and British financial institutions were second only to those of the Dutch in mobilizing private wealth for official purposes. The colonies, like the merchant marine, could be a liability as well as an asset because they had to be protected. Yet in the colonies the British found bold and determined people who were willing and able to provide some, at least, of the material resources to fight Britain's battles—and more important, to advance their own interests and so indirectly contribute to the growth of British power.

THE COLONIES

The British Empire in the first half of the eighteenth century included colonies stretching from the Mediterranean and the Atlantic to North America and the West Indies, and even to Africa and Asia. Some of the colonies were simply military stations or trading posts, whereas others were full-scale settlements with substantial British populations. All told, in 1750 perhaps fifteen million people outside the British Isles lived under the British flag. The empire they peopled had grown up in an unplanned and sporadic process dating back to the sixteenth century and largely the product of mercantilist assumptions. The three main areas of the British Empire were India, the West Indies, and North America.

India would one day be the most fabulous jewel in the imperial crown, but in the early eighteenth century British rule had scarcely penetrated the Indian subcontinent. The British did not *colonize* India at all, in the sense of establishing permanent settlements as home to a significant number of Britons. The British Empire in India was the result of private (though officially sanctioned) commercial initiative. A group of English merchants had formed the East India Company and received a royal charter in 1600 that granted it a monopoly on all English trade in the East Indies (in exchange for hefty contributions to the Crown). The East India Company established trading posts (called factories, but having nothing whatsoever to do with manufacturing) at Surat and subsequently Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta, where the company merchants bought pepper and cotton fabrics for export and resale in England. The Company also traded for coffee in Arabia and tea in China, and by the late seventeenth century, its merchants were doing a big business selling opium in both China and England.

The East India Company found in India the Moghul Empire at its height. The Moghuls were Muslims who ruled the northern two-thirds of India and who in the 1600s were seeking to expand into the South. The Company established normal relations with the Moghuls and negotiated for trading rights. But the Moghul Empire had a feudal structure, and its emperors could not exercise consistent rule over all their vassals; therefore, the Company had to deal with a large number of local rulers and fend off Dutch and Portuguese rivals as well. Company traders, never known for their timidity or moderation, did not hesitate to use force to exploit the weakness of the Moghul Empire, and by the eighteenth century the Company was behaving like a middle-rank Indian vassal, though it as yet *ruled* very little territory. In the early 1700s, the Moghul Empire began to break up, and its power began to slip away to important princes, including those of the Hindu Maratha Confederacy of central India. In this fluid situation, one of irresistible opportunity as well as political complexity, the East India Company eagerly scuffled for juicier trading concessions, but from the 1730s it faced increased competition from a new rival—the French East India Company.

The West Indian colonies also began as private initiatives in the early seventeenth century. Bermuda and the Bahamas were settled by an enterprise that had separated from a group of adventurers called the Virginia Company. Smaller chartered companies colonized other islands such as St. Kitts, Barbados, Jamaica, and Antigua. It did not bother these entrepreneurs that the islands they settled were claimed by Spain, but they did have to seize and defend their “plantations” in a long series of clashes not easily distinguishable from piracy. Eventually, treaties between England and Spain sanctioned English control of colonies in the West Indies.

Unlike India, but like North America, the West Indian islands attracted large numbers of British settlers. The British regarded them as “empty” and there for the taking. Further, the adventurers who went to the West Indies seeking their fortunes found that they could grow tobacco there and sell it for handsome profit in England. Tobacco plantations required labor, so the West Indian landowners began to import from England and Ireland indentured servants, who for the cost of their passage, food, and clothing, worked for a period of time (four to seven years) before achieving independence and moving on to their own land. By the 1640s there were twenty-five thousand English and Scots in the West Indies.

The tobacco trade, however, peaked in the mid-1600s, and West Indian plantation owners switched to growing sugar cane instead. An immensely

profitable crop, sugar made the West Indies the most valuable part of the British Empire in the early eighteenth century. Sugar was harder to grow than tobacco, however, and required a larger and tougher work force. The planters found the solution to their labor problem by importing black slaves from Africa. The slave population in the West Indies grew rapidly, forcing many smaller white landowners to sell out and move to North America. By the 1660s, there were more black slaves than white settlers in the British West Indies.

The growth of slavery in the West Indies (and the simultaneous importation of slaves into some North American colonies) transformed the Atlantic economy. Chartered companies—the Company of Royal Adventurers and its successor, the Royal African Company—established fortified trading posts in West Africa where they traded English manufactured goods such as guns and rum for slaves, who were crammed onto ships for the infamous Middle Passage across the Atlantic. Thousands of Africans died on the crowded slave ships; the survivors were then traded in the West Indies and southern American colonies for raw materials such as sugar, tobacco, and cotton. This *triangular trade* became enormously profitable for merchants in Glasgow, Bristol, and Liverpool. In the early 1750s, for instance, fifty-three slave ships a year left Liverpool on this triangular route.

In North America, the pattern of colonization was much more varied than in the West Indies, in terms of both who went and why. A number of North American colonies were founded by Englishmen seeking to practice without interference their own brands of Christianity. Puritans and other Nonconformists settled Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, whereas Roman Catholics founded Maryland and Quakers Pennsylvania. Other colonies were founded for straightforward purposes of commerce and profit. The company of Londoners who colonized Virginia simply wanted to make money any way they could. Tobacco plantations based on slave labor soon proved the answer. Later, English forces seized New Netherland from the Dutch and divided it into sections (New York, New Jersey, and Delaware) for great proprietors. Similarly, Charles II granted North and South Carolina as money-making opportunities to court favorites. Charles also chartered the Hudson Bay Company to allow certain English merchants a monopoly of the fur trade west of Hudson Bay in what is now Canada. Newfoundland, too, was settled under a commercial charter to exploit its rich fishing grounds and formally ceded to Britain in 1713. The last North American colony, Georgia, was established in 1732 by a philanthropic trust as a refuge for Englishmen released from debtors' prison.

The British colonies in North America differed from each other in religion, economic activity, and political structure, but they did have some features in common. One was that the colonies—or at least the thirteen strung out along the Atlantic coast—all had some degree of representative self-government. The English government, after all, had always allowed people to undertake colonizing enterprises on the condition that it cost the state nothing; thus, colonies were expected to take charge of their own local rule and protection. It would have been impossible for the English to exert direct rule across three thousand miles of ocean. Hence, by the 1700s, a standard form of government had grown up in the colonies based on a combination of normal company organization and the model provided by the English constitution. Most had a royal governor, an appointed advisory council, and elected assembly. The assemblies had the right, or rather the responsibility, of legislating and raising taxes to pay the governor and support other local government activities.

A second common feature of the colonies was the rapid growth of their populations. Like their counterparts in the West Indies, the British colonists in North America re-garded the land they found as empty and open to their settlement. It seems likely that over the previous century a wave of killing diseases had come up from Mexico, a product of the indigenous people's disastrous encounter with an entirely new microbiology brought in the respiratory and digestive systems of Spanish and Portuguese explorers. Mass death had slashed the Native American population even before the British arrived; hence, the Native Americans populated the land thinly and presented the British colonists with no civilization of visible splendor such as the British merchants found in India. In any case, the diseases brought by the English themselves ravaged the Native Americans, killing over 90 percent of some eastern tribes. Thus, what appeared to be open land beckoned to many people of middling ranks in the British Isles, some of whom were willing to risk the hazardous voyage, frontier hardships, and often a period of indentured servitude for a chance to better their lot.

Some English emigrants wanted a religious environment more suitable to their liking. Most hoped eventually to set up as small farmers or even as gentlemen. Relatively few of the very top and bottom rank of the English social hierarchy came—few aristocrats on the one hand or landless vagrants or beggars on the other. Highland Scottish clansmen led by their tacksmen came in large numbers after the Battle of Culloden. Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, unhappy in Anglican-dominated Ulster, came in droves—perhaps 250,000 came between 1700 and 1775. By 1700, the white population

(overwhelmingly British) stood at 250,000 in the thirteen colonies; by 1750 it had grown to almost a million, and there were 250,000 African slaves as well. In 1750, then, there were more Britons in North America than in Wales and almost as many as in Scotland.

These prosperous, enterprising, aggressive people were excellent trading partners for British trade and therefore pivotal to the increase in British power. Even though the British Empire in North America was never as centralized as the French in Canada or the Spanish in Central and South America, British trade with the American colonists was extremely lucrative. The Navigation Acts of the 1660s still provided that all ships trading in the colonies be either British or American and that certain *enumerated* products exported from the colonies had to go first to a British port. Among these were tobacco, sugar, indigo, rice, molasses, and naval stores—either extremely valuable goods not produced in Britain or items vital to the British navy. Further, most goods shipped from anywhere to America had to come through a British port. The Navigation Acts were never rigorously enforced, but they did help channel colonial trade to Britain's advantage. Even as the North American population grew, more than half of its exports went directly to Britain. By 1760, 15 percent of all British trade was with the North American colonies.

THE WAR OF JENKINS' EAR—KING GEORGE'S WAR (1739–1748)

Colonists could also, however, reshape British foreign affairs to their own advantage. British colonists in the West Indies were determined to exploit trade opportunities in the Spanish-American Empire in the teeth of efforts by the Spanish coast guard to stop them. Local clashes went on in the Caribbean throughout the 1720s and 1730s. In 1738, one Captain Jenkins displayed to an outraged House of Commons the ear (pickled in a jar) that he had lost to a Spanish cutlass. Although the incident had happened seven years before and despite Prime Minister Robert Walpole's own preference for peace and low taxes (see chapter 4), British and West Indian merchants, plus a number of political opportunists in Parliament, insisted on war. No doubt this colonial war (known in America as King George's War) would have involved France soon because French commercial efforts in India, the West Indies, and North America alike were beginning to rival British interests. In any event, in 1740 a general European conflict that erupted over the succession to the Hapsburg monarchy enveloped the Anglo-Spanish war and made France Britain's chief enemy.

The combination of military war on the Continent and naval war overseas revived a dispute in Britain over what the best strategy was—to fight France directly by armies on land (the *Continental* strategy) or to take advantage of Britain’s naval strength to strike overseas (the *maritime* or *blue-water* strategy). The concern of George II over Hanover and the commitment of the leading British policymakers to the European balance of power swung the debate in this instance toward the Continental approach. Britain sent an army of twelve thousand to Europe, hired thousands of German mercenaries, and subsidized both the Austrian and the Hanoverian armies. The British also pursued an aggressive naval policy, bottling up the French fleet in Brest, attacking numerous points in the West Indies, and preying on French merchant shipping.

The longer the war on the Continent dragged on, the more expensive and unpopular it became, especially among the English country gentry, whose patriotism always burned hot until taxes went up. The rising political star William Pitt (see chapter 4) expressed the general unhappiness with the Continental war: “The confidence of the people is abused by making unnecessary alliances; then they are pillaged to provide the subsidies. It is now apparent that this great, this powerful, this formidable Kingdom is considered only as a province of a despicable electorate [Hanover].” By 1747, both Britain and France were weary of war and ready for peace, as the resulting treaty (Aix-la-Chapelle) demonstrated: it merely restored the *status quo ante bellum* (the situation before the war). Neither side had gained anything of significance.

THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR—THE SEVEN YEARS’ WAR (1756–1763)

The Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle said nothing about the West Indian issues over which Britain had gone to war. This curious fact suggests that the treaty marked not a genuine settlement but a truce as far as Britain was concerned. The rivalry for empire between Britain and France intensified after 1748, particularly in North America. British colonists along the Atlantic seaboard wanted to push into the interior to claim land for commercial purposes. Two Virginia land companies, for example, sought to claim large tracts in the Ohio Valley. British colonial expansion, however, ran into French opposition. Though there were only about seventy-five thousand French settlers in North America, they had established forts and trading posts along the St. Lawrence, through the Great Lakes, and down the Mississippi. Now the French sought to extend their lucrative fur trade with



Britain's North American Empire, 1763. At the end of the Seven Years' War, Britain controlled Canada and the rest of North America east of the Mississippi. It also expanded its control in India and the Caribbean and so emerged as the most powerful commercial, colonial, and naval country in the world.

the Indians by seizing control of the Ohio Valley. Skirmishes between British and French colonists resulted.

In 1754, the French and their Indian allies defeated several militia companies from Virginia led by George Washington. In a fateful and unprecedented decision, the British government dispatched regular army troops

under General Braddock to aid the Virginians and directed the navy to prevent France from reinforcing its Canadian garrison. The British navy began capturing French merchant vessels, but the French ambushed Braddock's little army in July 1755. The British now felt they could not turn back; in May 1756 they declared war.

These events in America sent the British and French scrambling for allies in Europe. Britain traditionally supported Austria as a counterweight to France, but this time the British government thought that an alliance with Prussia would best protect Hanover and check the French; meanwhile, the Austrians settled into an alliance with France and Russia. The Anglo-French colonial war that broke out in 1755 thus expanded into a general European struggle. In fact, because this Seven Years' War was fought simultaneously in Europe, Asia, and the Americas, it was the first world war.

Initially the war went disastrously for the British, and parliamentary and public opinion alike demanded that Pitt, who had caught the imagination of the country with his imperial vision and blue-water strategy (fighting mainly on the oceans), be given control of the government. Horace Walpole wrote, "The nation is in a ferment. Instructions from counties, boroughs, especially the City of London, in the style of 1642 . . . all these tell Pitt he may command such numbers without doors [outside—in other words, in public opinion] as may make majorities within the House tremble." George II loathed Pitt, but in 1757, the king was forced to give way. Pitt came to power on a wave of supreme confidence: "I know that I can save this country and that no one else can."

Once in office, Pitt concentrated all his prodigious energy on the war effort. Recognizing that the nature of the war demanded simultaneous success on the Continent and in the colonies—otherwise, the winnings in one theater would have to be traded to compensate for losses in the other—Pitt gave up his extreme maritime strategy. Britain increased its own army to more than fifty thousand men, subsidized Prussia with £670,000 a year for four years, and paid for large numbers of German mercenaries as well. Largely because of the military genius of the Prussian king, Frederick the Great, the allied armies fought the French and Austrians to a standstill. Pitt in fact claimed that Canada was won for Britain in Germany.

Pitt did not neglect the war at sea and overseas, for he was able to see the war effort as a whole. The British navy imposed a close blockade on the French coast, turned the Mediterranean into a "British lake," and fended off French invasion of England by crushing the French fleet at Quiberon Bay in 1759. Combined army and navy forces plundered French islands in the West



The British Victory at Quebec (1759). *This illustration from the London Magazine shows the British troops (Scottish Highlanders) under General Wolfe making their way up a hidden path to the Plains of Abraham above Quebec, where they defeated French forces under General Montcalm. Though Wolfe was mortally wounded, the battle was a key to British supremacy in North America.*

Indies. In North America, Pitt directed a three-pronged offensive against New France: one force proceeded up the St. Lawrence to Quebec, a second moved north along Lake Champlain to attack Montreal, and a third marched west to take Fort Niagara and Fort Frontenac on Lake Ontario. All three campaigns were successful. By 1760, the British controlled all of North America east of the Mississippi.

Pitt refused to commit regular British forces to the struggle in India. He did increase the size of the British navy in the Indian Ocean to equal that of the French; otherwise, he left the East India Company on its own. John Company, as it was called, proved equal to the task. The Company and its French rival, struggling for influence in south-central and south-eastern India, put up rival Indian candidates for rule in the Carnatic (the area inland from Madras) in 1749. The British won, thanks to the heroic efforts of a small Anglo-Indian army led by a twenty-five-year-old clerk named Robert Clive, a man who was like Pitt in many ways—depressive but gifted, ambitious, and energetic. Pitt rightly called him a “heaven-born general.”

In the 1750s the British and French East India Companies began to clash in an even wealthier region, Bengal, with its great trading city,

Calcutta. In 1756 the *nawab* (prince) of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daula, marched on the fat British post in Calcutta with a massive army. The *nawab's* troops plundered Calcutta and imprisoned the British survivors in a miserable cell later called the Black Hole of Calcutta. About one hundred people died. The Company sent Clive with a force of three thousand men to relieve Calcutta. Siraj-ud-Daula withdrew, but Clive elected to join an Indian conspiracy against him. In June 1757, Clive led his small force of about one thousand Europeans and two thousand Indian *sepoys* against Siraj-ud-Daula's sixty thousand at the Battle of Plassey. Well-disciplined in the European style of drill, Clive's minuscule army won.

Although only fifty French artillery men had fought for Siraj-ad-Daula at Plassey, this victory marked a decisive shift of power on the subcontinent from the French to the British. Bengal fell to the Company, which now installed its own puppet as *nawab*. Indian politicians and bankers showered money on Clive, who returned to England with £234,000 in cash plus rentals worth £27,000 a year. Given the possibilities for riches in India, it was not actually so much. "By God," Clive later testified, "I stand amazed at my own moderation."

Politics in India thus proved even more profitable to the Company than trade; consequently, the Company made politics its business. Company officials in Bengal made prodigious sums by replacing one *nawab* after another: each time they threw out a native governor, hopeful political and commercial Bengalis came forward with magnificent bribes and gifts. In 1760–61, the Company succeeded in driving the French out of southern India, and by 1763 the East India Company, without ever really meaning to, had become a major political power in India.

THE PRIZES OF VICTORY

Given the impressive string of British victories on sea and land in all major theaters of the Seven Years' War, one would think that Pitt could have remained prime minister as long as he wished and that the British would proceed to crush France once and for all. Neither was to be the case. Pitt wanted to extend the war in a preemptive strike on the Spanish Empire. His grandiose plans, however, alarmed the more cautious members of the cabinet and, by 1760, the French were already making overtures for peace. Meanwhile, when George II died in 1760, Pitt lost a major pillar of support. In October 1761, he resigned. Ironically, Spain entered the war anyway, and in 1762 the British took Havana and Manila.

The Seven Years' War ended the next year with the Peace of Paris. In the House of Commons, an ill and shaky Pitt denounced the treaty as a surrender of the fruits of victory, but in fact the British did very well. They won back Minorca from France and retained Grenada, Domenica, St. Vincent, and Tobago in the West Indies; Canada, Cape Breton Island, Florida, and all of North America east of the Mississippi River; Senegal in Africa; and the East India Company's winnings in Bengal. Britain thus emerged as the most powerful commercial, colonial, and naval country on earth—a startling development from the small, bitterly divided state of the mid-seventeenth century.

Were these prizes worth the cost of seven years (nine, counting the skirmishes of 1754–55) of war? No one asked the ordinary British and colonial soldiers and sailors who shed their blood in battles around the globe. By custom, the soldiers in a victorious army were allowed to loot the enemy dead and wounded on the battlefield, and sailors were given a share in the spoils of captured *prize* ships, but the surviving evidence does not say whether they regarded these rewards and the simple pleasures of triumph as sufficient recompense for years of weary marching, harsh discipline, and privation, as well as moments of sheer terror and suffering. No doubt colonial North American soldiers, particularly those in the militia, found the removal of danger from the French and Indian forces on the northern and western frontiers very satisfying. Britons of the ruling elite and the mercantile classes not only benefitted from colonial investments, but also took pride in Britain's imperial identity.

For the common farmer or laborer of the British Isles, however, the war in the short run made little difference. To be sure, excise taxes and land taxes were high (four shillings to the pound for landowners); thus, consumer prices went up and some landlords may have raised their rents as a result. As we saw in chapter 3, the state apparatus grew because of the need to collect taxes and supply the army and navy. Otherwise, for the vast majority of Britons, the most important facts for the short term were that no battles were fought on British soil and that agricultural life went on as usual.

In the long run, however, the Seven Years' War, like all those since 1689, contributed to British economic development. Some economic historians have argued that Britain's entry into industrialization would have occurred sooner had these wars not happened. Britons of the day did not think so. To be sure, many enlightened philosophers like Adam Smith believed that trade and wealth grew best in the soil of peace. But most Britons, landowners and

commercial men alike, thought that success in war had increased national prosperity. They were probably right, especially in the case of the Seven Years' War. The war interfered very little with trade, and it stimulated many industries associated with shipbuilding, weapons manufacturing, and military supply. It also assured British control over many of the possessions that made Britain a great maritime and colonial power and that fueled the commercial sector of the economy. Perhaps that was reward enough.

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Part **II**

The Age of
Revolutions

1763–1815

Chapter 8

The Crisis of Empire, 1763–1783

No sooner had the British attained the heights of imperial power than they were beset by a series of major revolutions—colonial, economic, social, and political. Thus, the fifty years after 1763 constituted an age of crisis, a time when British industry was transformed, the society restructured, and the nation locked in a colossal struggle against the French Revolution. Even the religious temper and intellectual outlook of Britain were radically altered. It is a tribute to the stability and strength of eighteenth-century foundations—not least the landowners' regime—that Britain was able to weather these shocks without completely collapsing.

The first of these great crises came in the imperial realm. The British lost the American colonies they had fought with such determination to win. In the long discussions leading to the Treaty of Paris (1763), British policy makers chose to keep all of North America at the expense of advancing British interests in the West Indies. They consciously ranked the American colonies at the very top of their imperial plans. Yet it was precisely these colonies—the *most English* of all British possessions—that broke away. How this happened and how it might have been avoided are questions that have intrigued students of history ever since. In retrospect, two things seem certain: first, the Americans insisted almost to the end that all they wanted were the rights of Englishmen, and second, the British contributed mightily to the outcome, less by asserting despotic authority than by political insensitivity, a failure of imagination, and military blundering.

GEORGE III AND THE POLITICIANS

The failure to retain the American colonies was, therefore, a *political* failure for which both the British political system itself and the politicians who ran it shared the blame. At the center of the system after 1763 was the king, George III, who played a bigger political role than either of his



George III in Coronation Robes, by Allan Ramsay. The famous Scottish portraitist painted George III in his most elegant ceremonial costume, making the king appear rather grander than he actually was.

Hanoverian predecessors. For many years, both patriotic American historians and their liberal British colleagues believed that George III drove the American colonies out of the Empire by trying to make himself a despot—in other words that he attempted to arrogate all power unto himself and thus to undo the events of 1688 and the Revolution Settlement. More recent and exhaustive research, however, supports a more ironic interpretation of George III and his behavior. Far from being a tyrant, George III was a thoroughgoing Whig in his constitutional views. What he insisted on was the sovereignty of Parliament within a balanced constitution, and his obstinacy on that score constituted his contribution to the rupture with the American colonies.

George III was one of the most pathetic figures in modern British history. He was not up to the massive crises that Britain faced during his long reign (1760–1820), and from 1788 on he periodically suffered from severe

mental imbalance caused by the disease porphyria. He spent the last ten years of his life in a state of pitiable madness, often confined in a straitjacket. He was not insane at the time of the American crisis, however. Born in 1738, George III was only twenty-two when he succeeded his grandfather to the throne, and he was emotionally and intellectually immature. His father, Frederick, the prince of Wales, loathed King George II, and the feeling was mutual. Frederick and his advisers believed that wily politicians had duped George II and reduced him to puppet status. Although Frederick died in 1751, he passed on these semi-conspiratorial views to his son George. The young prince grew up in a lonely and stifling atmosphere. He was of average intelligence, but was diffident, shy, lethargic, and awkward.

The dominant figure in George's early life was the earl of Bute, a Scottish nobleman who was George's tutor and his mother's adviser. Bute clearly became a beloved father figure for the young prince of Wales. Bute was learned in a bookish way, elegant, polished, and ambitious. That he won the task of teaching George how to be king proved unfortunate because beneath Bute's arrogant exterior there lay only cleverness but no wisdom. George became completely dependent on Bute, and Bute reinforced the view that George II was caught in the web of the politicians. The prince of Wales grew up determined to rise above the corruption that typified Augustan politics, to free the Crown of political entanglements, and to exemplify virtue and morality. He would rule *above party*. There was in these intentions a good deal of priggish self-righteousness but no tyrannical leaning. "The pride," he wrote in a youthful essay, "the glory of Britain and the direct end of its constitution, is political liberty." In short, George accepted fully the Glorious Revolution and the supremacy of Parliament.

When George III became king in 1760, he felt he desperately needed Bute beside him. He hated the cabinet of the moment, including Prime Minister Pitt, whom he suspected of having betrayed his beloved father, the late Frederick. George made it clear that Bute spoke for him and that Bute would stand first among his ministers: "Whoever speaks against My Lord Bute speaks against me." As we have seen, Pitt resigned in 1761, and Bute became first lord of the Treasury (prime minister), though he had no claim to high office other than being the king's favorite.

Disgruntled Whig politicians interpreted the king's support for Bute as evidence that the king and Bute were subverting the constitution by restoring the royal prerogative. Such rhetoric had long been the resort of oppositional politicians of the Tory and Country Whig types. As we will see, the rhetoric found acceptance in America. Now three other factors seemed to

give substance to the rhetoric. One was that Bute was not tough or smart enough for the job of prime minister; although he soon resigned the office, he wanted to retain his personal influence with the king and thus to exercise power without responsibility. Many people believed—falsely—that Bute’s influence depended on illicit relations with George III’s mother.

A second factor was that George III, under Bute’s tutelage, did wish to rise above party—indeed, to put an end to party divisions, which he called *factions*. Hence, George in effect adopted old-fashioned Country party ideology and accepted Tories back into the pale of court and office. This meant that George was adopting Whig *theory* but not Whig *practice*, which were two very different things. The Whigs who had run the political machine since Walpole’s day claimed that George was in fact restoring Tory/Stuart ideas from before 1688.

Whig propaganda against George and the supposed backstairs illegitimate power of Bute became intense. Various proposals to limit the power of the Crown—to eliminate placemen from the House of Commons, for instance, or to abolish sinecures (jobs without real work attached) in the gift of the Crown—gained fairly widespread approval. The best example of Whig criticism of George III was Edmund Burke’s *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770). Burke, an émigré Irish intellectual, was the client of a Whig magnate, the marquess of Rockingham. He argued that, in trying to rule without party, the king was substituting personal rule and royal influence for the proper supremacy of the House of Commons. To Burke, parties were not mere factions seeking office, but bodies of men “united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed.” This noble idea became the classic definition of political parties in the nineteenth century, but it was not an accurate description in the eighteenth century. It was only a sublime rationalization of Whig self-interest and quest for office and power. In fact, George III had better claims to constitutionality than did Burke and the Rockingham Whigs. Yet in this case, as in most politics, what people believed was more important than the facts.

JOHN WILKES AND POPULAR POLITICS

The third factor leading people to suspect George III of working to establish royal tyranny was one that had great impact on colonial American political consciousness—the affair of John Wilkes. More than any other individual of eighteenth-century Britain, Wilkes challenged the assumption



John Wilkes, by William Hogarth (1763). The great caricaturist portrayed Wilkes, the popular political gadfly, in his most devilish aspect.

that the populace should be excluded from the legitimate political system. He was a very unlikely radical hero. The son of a rich London brewer, Wilkes was a debauched spendthrift who got by on his audaciousness, wit, and charm. Though he was startlingly ugly, he could, as he said, talk away his looks in half an hour. He was ambitious to cut a figure in the world of the governing elite. By spending thousands of pounds in the ways customary to Augustan politics, Wilkes got himself elected to Parliament, but soon gambled and drank away the rest of his (and his wife's) fortune. To make ends meet, he became a journalist, dependent on the patronage of the Whig grandee, Lord Temple. Then his political troubles and triumphs began.

Wilkes's paper, the *North Briton*, was a flashy, aggressive critic of Bute's government and that of his successor, George Grenville. In issue number 45, Wilkes launched a fierce attack on the king's speech of 1763 (the policy

statement of the government on the day that opened the annual session of Parliament) and the terms of the Treaty of Paris. Wilkes not only described the king's ministers as "tools of despotism and corruption," but he also seemed to call the king a liar. The prime minister of the moment, George Grenville, thought that this was seditious libel and issued a general warrant for the arrest of "the authors, printers, and publishers" of the *North Briton*. Wilkes was arrested, but he fought the charges on grounds that general warrants (which specified no names and therefore could be used to arrest any troublemaker) were illegal. Moreover, he deliberately identified himself with the ordinary citizen by claiming that his arrest threatened the liberty "of all the middling and inferior sort of people who stand most in need of protection."

Wilkes won his case and became a popular champion of civil liberties as well. But the Wilkes affair had only just begun. In a triumphant mood, he republished Number 45. This enraged the House of Commons, which now expelled him. Wounded in a duel and intimidated by government pressure, Wilkes fled to Paris, but he was prosecuted and outlawed in absentia for having published an indecent satire called *Essay on Woman*. In 1768, however, Wilkes, dogged by his creditors in France, returned to England and stood for Parliament in Middlesex. This constituency in North London was one of the few with a broad electorate. Wilkes's candidacy was popular with the artisans and shopkeepers (as well as with the mobs of nonvoters) of London and of the provincial cities as well. He was elected, but denied his seat by the House of Commons and then imprisoned on the old charge of seditious libel. Well-to-do merchants and workmen alike rallied to his cause, and while in prison he was reelected by the Middlesex voters twice more, only to be expelled by the House of Commons. Finally, after a third reelection, the Commons simply declared the election of the government-supported candidate, who actually had lost miserably to Wilkes.

By then the radical Wilkesite movement was well under way. Everywhere the slogans "Wilkes and Liberty" or simply "45" were chalked on walls or paraded on banners. Provincial newspapers speaking for the middling and lower ranks still excluded from the vote brimmed over with stories about Wilkes and defenses of his cause. Affluent business and professional men, and even some country gentlemen, in 1769 founded the Society of Supporters of the Bill of Rights. Initially it was chartered to pay Wilkes's debts, but it later advocated a program of reform including both civil liberties and political change. For the first time in England there was a nationwide popular political movement. It was anti-aristocratic and civil libertarian in sen-

timent, for Wilkes had challenged general warrants and asserted freedom of the press. But the Wilkesite movement also advocated parliamentary reform: the right of a constituency to send to Parliament anyone they pleased, the removal of government officeholders from the House of Commons, more frequent elections, and more equal representation in the sense of disqualifying *rotten boroughs* (areas that had lost most or even all of their population yet still had a member of Parliament) in order to give representation to the large cities. Implicit in all these ideas was a new and different concept of parliamentary membership—that is, that an MP ought to *represent* (consciously speak for) his constituents. The enormity of this claim was clear to the elite. As one MP complained, “Such is the levelling principle that has gone forth, that the people imagine that they themselves should be judges over us.”

Wilkes in 1774 was again elected to Parliament and allowed to take his seat. This helped defuse the radical bomb. Wilkes did not prove to be a vigorous reform MP and referred to himself as “an exhausted volcano,” although he did insist on the right of newspapers to publish accounts of parliamentary proceedings. George III had once called him “that devil Wilkes,” but now was surprised to find him a gentleman. However, the effect of the Wilkes affair on British politics had been profound, partly because it was a transitional movement between the riotous popular politics of eighteenth-century England and the more focused and better organized mass politics of nineteenth-century Britain, and not least because many American politicians followed the case closely and became enthusiastic Wilkesites.

BRITONS INTO AMERICANS

The sympathy of British colonists in North America for Wilkes was but one of many pieces of evidence indicating that they were, in ways mostly unnoticed, becoming a people less British and more American. The conscious identity of the colonists clearly remained British until July 1776, but the Wilkesite seeds fell onto the soil of a political culture that already was subtly different from the dominant culture in Britain. The slow growth of a new national identity for America was so complex, and the emotional and mental roots of most colonists so firmly planted in Britain, that the discovery of their differentness in the heat of events after 1763 came as a disagreeable surprise to people on both sides of the Atlantic. Unless this growth is understood, the violence of American reaction to post-1763 imperial policies and the rapid growth of the independence movement must remain a mystery.

The growth of American identity was not a steady linear development. Broadly speaking, the earliest English settlers in America retained close personal and economic ties to England. Then, in the course of the seventeenth century, as a result of coping with wilderness conditions in isolation from the mother country, colonial cultures in North America began to grow apart from Britain. With the taming of the coastal (or tidewater) areas and the original river valley settlements, however, came an economic and social stability and a relative ease of intercourse with England that tended to anglicize the colonies. The ideas of the Enlightenment, which spread to North America, incorporated colonial high culture into the British world. The great evangelical religious revival of the early eighteenth century, called the Great Awakening in the colonies, did the same for popular religion. Perhaps more important, the tremendous sale of English consumer goods in America anglicized colonial material culture. As one historian, T. H. Breen, has put it, "Staffordshire china replaced crude earthenware; imported cloth replaced homespun." In these ways, the colonies were never so English as in the third quarter of the eighteenth century.

Nevertheless, there were some important differences between the colonists in North America and the English at home. For one thing, by the 1760s there were substantial numbers of people in America who were not English by origin or descent. By 1775, probably 20 percent of the 2.5 million people in the colonies were of African origin or descent. Another 10 percent were Scotch-Irish immigrants from Ulster, and another 9 percent were Germans. There were also thousands of Scots, Dutch, French Huguenots, Swedes, and other national groups.

Moreover, it is important to remember that many of the original English colonists were religious refugees who had deliberately rejected England. The Pilgrims, for instance, had sought to found a utopia of pure, simple piety separate from the corrupting power and wealth of England. The Puritans had rejected the English state in order to establish perfect Calvinist communities that would stand as cities of righteousness for all the world to follow. Neither ideal was sustainable over the long haul, but the sense implicit in both, that the colonization of America was the fulfillment of God's plan, sounded chords that would resonate in the emerging American identity.

There were differences, mostly unremarked, between English and American social structures as well. As has been noted in chapter 7, the English social hierarchy was not completely replicated in the colonies because the very top and bottom ranks did not cross the ocean. To be sure, colonial elites did form during the 1700s, and most of their members aped English

ways. Their efforts to make themselves into English-style aristocrats and gentry were not very successful, however. The colonial aristocracy was based on money alone, and most of the families had made their fortunes so recently that the hard work showed. They lacked the polish and time-honored traditions that served as the emblems of social distinction in England. Further, the deference that English landed families enjoyed and that colonial elites desired simply was not forthcoming from the ordinary colonist. The ready availability of land and the rigors of the frontier life bred a sense of independence that fitted poorly into a hierarchical social structure. Even in the southern colonies, where the planters liked to think of themselves as landed gentry, the resemblance to English gentlemen was strained: the planters, after all, were slave owners and hard-pressed agricultural businessmen who treated their slaves more like industrial workers than tenant farmers or farm laborers protected to a degree by custom and paternalism.

Some recognition of such differences began to be articulated during the colonial wars, when colonial troops came into contact with the British army. Especially during the Seven Years' War (called the French and Indian War in the colonies), feelings of dissimilarity between themselves and the British became widespread among American militiamen. More than twenty thousand colonists served during the war, many of them in operations with regular British army units. Neither side liked what it saw. The British thought the colonials were ill-disciplined, unreliable, and incapable of executing a sustained campaign. The Americans found the British officers to be impenetrably arrogant and inflexible and the troops to be servile and brutalized.

The differences between British and American governmental institutions went largely unrecognized because most colonists believed that colonial political arrangements duplicated in miniature the British constitution. Yet there were differences. The colonial governors had more formal powers than did the king at home—they could, for example, dismiss judges at will and dissolve or delay sessions of the colonial assemblies—but much less informal power in the shape of patronage and influence. More important, the assemblies in the American colonies more directly represented their constituents than did the House of Commons. The colonies had no rotten or pocket boroughs. In New England, town meetings customarily instructed their representatives about the policies they should pursue. Because landownership was so widespread in America, the ordinary forty-shilling freehold franchise gave the vote to 50 to 75 percent of the adult male population. The sense of independence characteristic of colonial British American society was thus reflected in colonial politics.

Finally, there developed in the thirteen colonies a distinctive political ideology. The colonial self-image of simplicity and uncorrupted innocence inclined the Americans to accept Lockean political theory in pure form. Hence the *opposition* or *Country* philosophy, the stance of a minority in Britain, became the dominant ideology in America. The colonists believed in natural, unalienable rights; in the concept of an original social contract; in government by consent of the governed; and in the necessity of a balance in the constitution to protect liberty. Like British *Country* oppositional publicists such as John Trenchard (d. 1723), Thomas Gordon (d. 1750), and Viscount Bolingbroke (d. 1751), Americans thought that a virtuous citizenry was necessary to maintain the constitutional balance. In the 1740s and 1750s, some colonial visitors to Britain began to believe that political corruption was ruining the ideal British constitution and thereby threatening liberty. John Dickinson of Pennsylvania wrote of the English election of 1754: "Bribery is so common that it is thought there is not a borough where it is not practiced. . . . It is grown a vice here to be virtuous." It was this prevailing *Country* ideology that led British Americans to understand imperial events after 1763 as a conspiracy to subvert the British constitution and destroy their liberty.

TIGHTENING THE EMPIRE

It would be a mistake, however, to say that the slow development of a colonial self-identity led inevitably to independence and war. The imperial crisis that began in 1763 and ended in 1776 should have been manageable if the British had shown some imagination and flexibility. An arrangement giving the colonies *some* kind of home rule—provincial autonomy under Parliament and/or the Crown—was a distinct possibility even after the colonials had taken up arms. How different the history of the modern world would have been if some such solution had been found! But the course of events after 1763 led the British government to think that the very foundation of the Empire and the sovereignty of Parliament were being challenged and the colonials to think that their cherished British liberties were being denied. Once locked into these positions, the two sides could find no compromise.

After the Peace of 1763, the British quite reasonably and naturally took up the problem of how to manage their vastly expanded empire. During the first half of the eighteenth century, British policy toward the North American colonies had been one of *benign neglect*. Now, however, the king and his

ministers believed that a degree of rationalization was in order so that the expense of maintaining the colonies would not cancel their positive value to Britain.

The policies that resulted from this concern bore the imprint of George Grenville, who had succeeded the egregious Bute as the king's chief minister. Grenville was an able man in a plodding sort of way. George III heartily disliked him: "That gentleman's opinions are seldom formed from any other motives than such as may be expected to originate in the mind of a clerk in a counting house." Like most British politicians, Grenville knew little about American attitudes and traditions. He began tightening the lines of imperial rule by ordering customs officials to enforce the various laws regulating colonial trade. Next, by the Proclamation of 1763, Grenville set the western limit of British settlement at the Appalachian mountains, beyond which the mother country would not defend American settlers. By this act, he hoped to keep down the cost of the Empire, for he knew that colonial expansion into the vast territory between the Appalachians and the Mississippi would cause endless trouble with the Indians. Defense of the region would require many thousands of regular army troops and expenditures far beyond what the British taxpayer would tolerate.

The British government thought that taxes at home had already stretched public support to the limit. The Seven Years' War had increased the national debt to nearly £140 million. Grenville did not seek to have the Americans pay any of the annual debt charge, but he did think it reasonable for them to help pay for their own defense, namely for the ten thousand red-coats now left in America. He might simply have imposed a quota on each colony and let them raise the money as they pleased, but such a requisition system had not worked during the war. Thus, Grenville chose to treat the colonies as a single unit and tax them directly. By the Sugar Act of 1764, Parliament reduced the duty on foreign molasses imported into the colonies, with the view of actually collecting the smaller duty. By the Stamp Act of 1765, the government imposed fees on legal papers, newspapers, customs documents, diplomas, advertisements, and the like.

Grenville's policies were logical, but they ignored colonial opinion. The colonists erupted in protest to the point that war almost broke out in 1765–66. The land-hungry colonists were unhappy about the Proclamation Line, and they complained loudly that the Sugar Act took away their property (that is, money) without their consent. They were even angrier about the Stamp Act. Newspapers lashed out in editorials and letters of protest; riots flared all along the Atlantic seaboard. Crowds harassed stamp officials and

attacked their homes and offices. In most towns, colonials formed groups called the Sons of Liberty to defy the tax. Merchants organized a boycott of British goods.

In their protests, the Americans did not bother with the details of the Stamp Act, but went directly to the fundamental issue of constitutional rights. This is what made their defiance of the law so alarming to the British and inspired the official British response to be so inflexible. Against the colonial cries of “no taxation without representation,” the British argued that the colonies *were* represented in Parliament, not directly but *virtually*. Just as the people of Manchester or Birmingham, who sent no members to Parliament, were yet represented there, so were the people of America because each MP, as one writer put it, “sits in the House not as a Representative of his own Constituents, but as one of that august Assembly by which all the Commons of Great Britain are represented.” Moreover, when the colonists rejected the will of Parliament, they denied the most crucial element of the British constitution—the sovereignty of Parliament. Without that principle, British liberties would collapse.

The colonists readily agreed that British *rights* reached across the Atlantic to the New World, but they denied that British *jurisdiction* did. From their beginnings, the Americans contended, the colonies had borne the responsibility and right of legislating for themselves. Parliament might regulate imperial trade for the benefit of the Empire, but to *tax* the colonists denied the principles of 1688 and laid the basis for the destruction of colonial liberty. They dismissed as ridiculous the claims that the colonies enjoyed any kind of representation in Parliament. American traditions of voting and representation were straightforward and direct: all freeholders voted for representatives in the colonial assemblies, which were thereby empowered to tax. But they were not represented in Parliament in any sense, nor did they ask to be. The Americans preferred their own assemblies, which would be more responsive to their needs than a Parliament three thousand miles away in London and in which the few American MPs would be as ineffective as the Scottish representatives after 1707.

Grenville possibly would have backed up the Stamp Act by force, but in 1766 he fell from office after a personal dispute with George III. Into power came a ministry of “old”—that is, mainstream—Whigs led by the marquess of Rockingham. They sought to embarrass Grenville and placate commercial interests in Britain who were hurt by the American boycott by repealing the Stamp Act—but they then undid much of the good will thus generated by passing a Declaratory Act, which insisted that Parliament did in fact have

the authority of legislating for the colonies. Even Pitt, who had supported the American protests against the Stamp Act, agreed with the Declaratory Act. Such was the limit to which even sympathetic British politicians would go: all Britons agreed that the principle of parliamentary sovereignty over every part of the Empire must be defended.

Despite its accomplishments, the Rockingham ministry lacked the confidence of both king and Commons, and it inevitably fell from office later in 1766. The stage was set for one of the great *what if* moments in British history. The politically adept Pitt—whom we now must call Chatham, as he had been elevated to the peerage as earl of Chatham—could conceivably have constructed a lasting accommodation with the colonies. But Chatham's mental stability gave out in 1767, and the lead was taken by his chancellor of the exchequer, Charles Townshend, who proceeded to reverse Chatham's policy of reconciliation with America. Townshend, a brilliant but politically obtuse man, wrongly believed that the colonies would not object to external taxation. Thus, he sought to relieve Britain's financial troubles and to free the colonial governors from their dependence on their assemblies at the same time by laying duties on the importation into the colonies of glass, lead, paints, paper, and tea. The revenue would be used to pay the salaries of the governors and other colonial officials.

Townshend's grievous mistake in judgment roused colonial opposition that was as fierce and effective as the earlier opposition against the Stamp Act. The Americans revived their arguments about fundamental rights and renewed the boycott of British goods. Worse, the British officials sent to America to collect the Townshend duties behaved little better than rapacious racketeers. Confrontation between bureaucrats and protesters became very intense. Townshend died later in 1767, and because an insignificant amount of revenue was actually collected, Parliament backed away. In 1770, the Townshend duties were repealed, except one on tea, which was retained as a symbol of British authority.

The repeal of the Townshend duties did little to dissipate the mistrust between Parliament and the colonials. The British government sent troops to Boston to help enforce the Townshend duties, and the colonists interpreted this action as another step in the campaign to deprive them of their liberty. The Wilkesite affair, which the colonists watched closely, confirmed their suspicions. At home, incidents between the army and the citizens of Boston resulted, the worst being the so-called Boston Massacre of 1770, when five colonials were killed. In 1772, after further clashes between American merchants and British revenue collectors, the colonies began to set up

Committees of Correspondence to coordinate their opposition. In 1773, Parliament made the matter worse by its attempt to help the financially troubled East India Company. The Company was granted the right to sell tea in America at a cut rate and without dealing through colonial merchants. People in all the colonies resisted what they saw as a British conspiracy to establish a monopoly, and in Boston protesters dumped the tea into the harbor. Parliament responded with a number of laws punishing Boston, which only roused the solidarity of other colonies with their Massachusetts neighbor.

By this point, a growing body of Americans was reacting to every move Parliament made in an almost paranoid fear of British tyranny. Thomas Jefferson, for instance, claimed that the British imperial reforms amounted to “a deliberate, systematical plan of reducing us to slavery.” In June 1774, with a ghastly sense of timing, Parliament aggravated these suspicions by passing the Quebec Act. This set up a civil government with only an appointed council, gave special recognition to Roman Catholicism, and extended the boundary of the former French province into the Ohio Valley. The Americans saw the Quebec Act as an obvious attempt to frustrate American expansion to the West, to sponsor the spread of popery, and to establish nonrepresentative colonial institutions to boot. Coupled with the *Coercive Acts* on Boston, the Quebec Act stood as tyranny exposed. Representatives of twelve colonies gathered in Philadelphia to discuss collective efforts to defend colonial rights. Independence was still too extreme a measure for them, but probably a majority agreed with Jefferson that Parliament had no sovereignty over the colonies even though the colonies and Britain were united under the Crown. Hence, this Continental Congress rejected the idea of a united colonial government exercising *home rule*, but subordinate in imperial affairs to Parliament. Perhaps something like *dominion status* (colonial authority under the Crown, but not under Parliament) was still possible, but the British (including George III) were incapable of imagining such a solution. In their view, as Thomas Hutchinson, the governor of Massachusetts, said in 1772, “No line can be drawn between the supreme authority of parliament and the total independence of the colonies.”

THE WAR FOR COLONIAL INDEPENDENCE

Given the determination of the king and his ministers to force the colonies to submit to the will of Parliament and given the resolve of many Americans to resist, violence was inevitable. In 1775, General Thomas Gage, commander of the British forces in North America, decided to carry out a

preemptive strike by seizing the powder and shot that the local militia was storing in Concord. On the way, his troops were fired on by Massachusetts minutemen at Lexington and then suffered severe losses on the return march to Boston.

The outbreak of fighting radically altered the situation. When the Second Continental Congress gathered in May 1775, it had to conduct a revolution that already had started. Still, the Congress petitioned George III, asking that he redress their grievances and treat the colonial assemblies as coequal with Parliament. George III, determined to protect the supremacy of Parliament, rejected this “olive branch” petition and declared the colonies to be in rebellion. Colonial opinion now swung sharply against him. In January 1776, colonial animus against the king was articulated and spread by Tom Paine’s *Common Sense*, one of the most effective political tracts in the history of the English-speaking world. Paine, who had only emigrated to America from England in 1774, argued with telling simplicity and cogency that the colonies ought to break with Britain completely, and that meant breaking with the king as well as with Parliament. The American faith in monarchy, he wrote, was entirely unjustified, for the Crown itself stood as a principal source of arbitrary government. The law ought to be king in America, not the “royal brute of Britain.” Paine’s tract was crucial in turning the Americans into republicans.

Finally, in July 1776, the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, ironically one of the greatest documents of the British Enlightenment. It was a thoroughly Lockean piece of reasoning—a statement of natural rights philosophy that explained why the Americans believed that their consent to be governed had been violated and why they therefore dissolved the original contract of civil government with Britain. It explored, in short, a contradiction in standard Whig philosophy between the sovereignty of Parliament (which Britain chose) and the consent of the governed (which America chose).

George III, his ministers, and a majority in Parliament all resolved to end the rebellion by force. Given this intention, the British should have waged the war with full commitment, energy, and ruthlessness while holding out a constitutional compromise to woo colonial moderates. But they never understood either the extent of colonial opposition or the kind of war they faced. Moreover, they underestimated the staggering difficulty of coordinating and supplying military operations in hostile territory an ocean away. The British government thought that its basic role was to assist the loyal colonists (whose numbers it overestimated) to overcome the disloyal

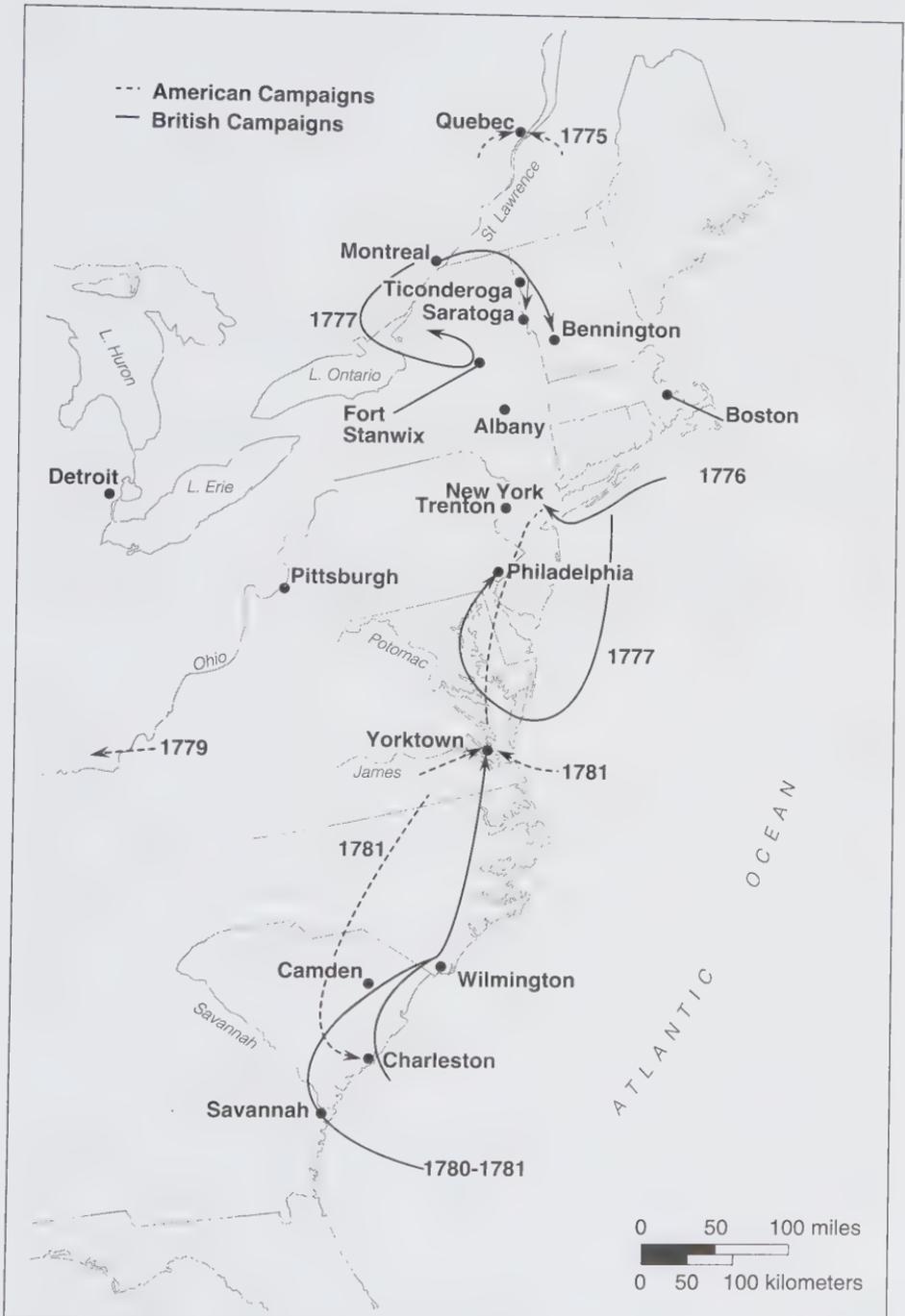
ones. In fact, though the British army (with German mercenaries) won many battles, colonial opposition sprang up again as soon as the army left a given locality. Thus, the British never committed the number of troops necessary, and worse, they eventually lost their accustomed mastery of the seas.

British tactics were adequate had they been executed with sufficient vigor and resources. At the outset, the British aimed sensibly enough at cutting New England off from the rest of the colonies. General William Howe's forces took New York in 1776, and in the following year, General Burgoyne moved south from Canada along the Hudson toward Albany. Howe should have pushed north from New York to link up with him, but he allowed himself to be diverted by Washington's Continental army and the prospect of capturing Philadelphia. Burgoyne found his army isolated and outnumbered near Saratoga, New York, where he surrendered.

The defeat at Saratoga proved doubly disastrous because it gave the French sufficient confidence in the Americans to ally with them and ended the continuing hope among some Britons that the colonies could ultimately be salvaged. Since 1763, the French had been anxious to restore their own prestige and reduce British power. The American war for independence gave the French a splendid opportunity. From 1778, therefore, the British faced a renewal of world war, struggling with France in the East Indies and in the West Indies, as well as in America. Fearing a French invasion of the British Isles, the British government committed a large number of ships to the English Channel. It also shifted army and navy units from America to the West Indies. Moreover, in 1779, Spain joined the conflict against Britain, and in 1780 Britain had to declare war on the Dutch in order to protect the Baltic trade. These developments drained British resources away from the war in America.

Nevertheless, in 1780, the British effort in America fared better, as the army captured Georgia and South Carolina. Had the British commander in the South, Earl Cornwallis, been able to launch an effective attack northward, he might have separated the southern colonies from the rest and then put down the rebellion in the mid-Atlantic region. But colonial guerrilla warfare harassed the British and Loyalist detachments in the South, and Cornwallis soon found himself in Virginia without adequate support and besieged by Washington. In 1781, a French fleet in the Chesapeake cut Cornwallis off from relief or retreat by sea, and Cornwallis surrendered.

By then the failure of the British government to conduct the war effectively had stimulated much opposition at home inside and outside Parliament. The chief minister, Lord North, had been in office since 1770 and was



Military campaigns against the American colonists during the American Revolution. The British captured Georgia and North Carolina, but were unable to capitalize on these victories. Pinned between George Washington's troops and a French fleet, General Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown.

the first politician since Bute whom George III trusted. The two thought alike, and North was intelligent, witty, and an able public financier. Yet North was not a strong war minister, for he was indolent and lethargic. He was unable to weld the cabinet into a single unit, and even the two ministers in charge of the army and the navy pulled in different directions. North knew his own weaknesses and frequently begged George III to let him resign. But George III himself was facing the war with stubborn, if dull-witted, courage, and he insisted that North stay on. George's political activism only aggravated the sense among the opposition that he was imposing personal rule on the nation. Independent country gentlemen joined commercial men who were unhappy about the disturbance of trade to form a radical movement devoted to ending financial waste and war profiteering and to "restoring" the balance in the constitution. At the same time, certain Whig factions—the Rockingham and Chathamite interests—took up the related issues of peace and parliamentary reform. Finally, in 1782, a sufficient number of independent MPs joined the opposition to force North to resign and the king to accept a cabinet committed to peace.

THE AFTERMATH

The Treaty of Versailles (1783) that ended the war granted the American colonies independence and ceded to them all the land between the Appalachians and the Mississippi. This was a grievous loss to Britain—perhaps one-fifth of all the people in the Empire and a territory that was bound to grow in prosperity and trade. Otherwise, the British did fairly well in the treaty making. France was the biggest loser in the war. The British navy had reasserted its preeminence in the West Indies; consequently, the French won only a few West Indian islands, plus Dakar and Senegal in West Africa. Spain got Florida and Minorca, but Britain kept Gibraltar, Canada, and the Newfoundland fisheries. Most importantly, the British kept the trans-Appalachian west out of French hands. Moreover, though few expected it in 1783, British trade with America rebounded with amazing speed. By 1790, for instance, British exports to America exceeded prewar levels.

Nevertheless, from the British point of view, it obviously would have been better to keep the American colonies in the Empire. Could they have done this after 1763? Certainly the American colonies were growing and maturing so rapidly that some degree of autonomy would have been necessary by the early nineteenth century. Further, the removal of the French threat to the colonies by 1763 reduced the need for British protection. How-

ever, timely and intelligent constitutional concessions might well have attracted moderate colonial opinion and strengthened the Loyalists, who composed between a fourth and a third of the colonial population. Three factors seem to have prevented such conciliatory proposals: (1) the near-universal assumption of Britain that colonies existed to serve the home country, (2) the complete agreement of Britons on the principle of parliamentary sovereignty, and (3) the inadequacy of the political system. It is important to remember that the British political structure actually functioned to promote the political interests, narrowly conceived, of the members of various elite factions and not to formulate policies directed to the welfare of the country. Hence, it was no accident that the domestic cry for reform and the constitutional claim of the colonists coincided.

As for the war, it was possible for the British to win militarily, but impossible to impose direct parliamentary rule on the colonies or even to return to pre-1763 conditions. To win the war would have required the British government to recognize that this was no conventional European campaign wherein holding the battlefield at the end of the day meant victory, and it would have required a huge commitment of money and men—perhaps even in Europe—to draw off the French. Neither requirement ever came close to being met. But blame should not rest too heavily on the shoulders of George III and his hapless ministers: not even the great powers of the twentieth century had much success in fighting against movements for national liberation.

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Chapter 9

The Rise of the Protestant Nation in Ireland

America was not the only source of colonial troubles in Britain in the eighteenth century. Just across St. George's Channel in Ireland, a political movement threatened to lead the Emerald Isle along the trail toward independence blazed by the Americans. In fact, the spirit of independence in America reinforced that in Ireland, and vice versa. The Irish Patriot movement, however, was not the product of the nation as a whole, but of the Anglo-Protestant population—that exceptionally narrow landowning elite that had been planted in Ireland as an English garrison. Hence, this movement had only tenuous links to the mass of the Irish people, Celtic and Catholic as they were. In America, the white population formed a social order heavily weighted toward the middling sorts—small farmers and merchants. In Ireland, there existed two separate cultures, the one standing uneasily on the back of the other. Indeed, the rise of the so-called *Protestant nation* in Ireland depended on the absolute ascendancy of the Anglo-Protestant landlords over the impoverished native Irish. That relationship of ascendancy and subordination first allowed and then limited the development of the Protestant nation.

THE PROTESTANT LANDLORDS AND THEIR CULTURE

The victory of William III's army in 1689–91 left the Protestant Ascendancy firmly in control of Ireland. Although they numbered no more than about 250,000 people (approximately 10 percent of the total Irish population) in 1700, Anglo-Protestants owned 85 percent of the land. The Catholic aristocracy and gentry had for the most part been reduced to the status of tenant farmers, some living sullenly on the edge of estates they had once owned. The Irish Parliament, once more in the hands of Anglican landlords,

ensured Protestant power by passing the penal laws (see chapter 2), which, among other things, prevented Catholics from acquiring land and made it difficult for the remaining Catholic owners to hold onto their estates. By 1739, one writer could say with some accuracy that “there are not twenty Papists in Ireland who possess each £1,000 a year in land.”

The Anglican landowners sought to exclude even the Nonconformists of Ulster from their monopoly of power and privilege. In the early 1700s, the Irish Parliament passed a Test Act similar to that in England, excluding Dissenters from public office. The Nonconformists of Ulster, most of them Presbyterians of Scottish origin, amounted to perhaps 9 percent of the total Irish population but held a majority in the northern province. Though few were landlords, they were a hard-working and prosperous people who despised the episcopal system of the established Church of Ireland. Consequently, Anglican landlords viewed them with suspicion. This treatment drove many of the Scotch-Irish to immigrate to North America between 1700 and 1775.

The Church of Ireland itself showed little interest in proselytizing either Ulster Nonconformists or Irish Catholics. Afflicted by the same diseases of political patronage, plural holdings, and nonresidence of clergy that handicapped the Church of England, the Church of Ireland contented itself with maintaining its position of established privilege, including the requirement that everyone, regardless of religion, had to pay the tithe to the Church of Ireland. The bishops were usually English appointees, and few took any interest in their duties. One bishop remarked that “a true Irish bishop had nothing more to do than eat, drink, grow fat, rich and die.” Here and there humane Anglican priests brought a note of English-style civilization to their remote Irish parishes, but most had little contact with the mass of the population. The Anglican parsons were mostly English educated and spoke only English, whereas many ordinary Irish people were illiterate and spoke only Gaelic, a language that most Anglican clergymen and gentry alike regarded as barbaric.

The relationship of the Irish Catholic priest to his flock was totally different. The penal laws did not prohibit the practice of Catholic services, but they banned Catholic bishops and *regular clergy* (that is, members of religious orders) from Ireland, and they prevented priests from coming into Ireland from abroad. Most Irish Catholic clergymen were recruited, therefore, from the impoverished people whom they served. Few were well educated, and many spoke only Gaelic. But their roots in the Irish population and their own poverty made for close relations with their parishioners. Many

received payment in kind. As one priest said, “The people give the fruit of their labours liberally to me and I give them my time, my care and my entire soul. . . . Between us there is a ceaseless exchange of feelings of affection.” Because of these relations of trust, and because of the absence of a native Catholic gentry, the Catholic clergy in Ireland inherited the leadership of the populace.

That leadership did not contribute to any Catholic revolutionary movement, except at the very end of the century. For most of the eighteenth century, the ascendancy of the Anglo-Protestant landlords was unquestioned. Jacobitism caused no ripples in Ireland in either 1715 or 1745. Agrarian crime, which always expressed an element of religious and political resentment, was never entirely absent, but it stood at a low level through the first half of the century. Neither the Catholic clergy nor the gentry was in a position to provide leadership of a popular political movement, and a Catholic merchant class developed only slowly. Thus, the Protestant landlords for the time being could push to the recesses of their consciousness the natural insecurity that arose from their isolation amid the sea of native Irish.

In the eighteenth century, therefore, the Anglo-Protestant gentry lived in what was for them a time of comparative security and ease. Many of them, however, never felt comfortable in Ireland and spent most of their time in England. Some of the newcomers, whose families had obtained their land only toward the end of the seventeenth century, failed to win acceptance at the top of their local social hierarchy. Others naturally gravitated to the center of their culture—London. These absentee landlords, who often were the butt of English scorn for their Irish brogue and backwoods manners, had a damaging effect on the Irish economy and society. They drained capital away from the country, and they deprived the agricultural sector of much-needed leadership. They also failed to establish the face-to-face relations that might have bridged the enormous gap between rulers and ruled.

Yet the resident landlords were sometimes not much better. The rate of imprudent, lavish, and riotous living was unusually high among the Irish gentry. They prided themselves so much on their swashbuckling independence that dueling was an important aspect of Irish life. The wastrel Irish landlord with no interests other than field sports and hard drink became an English stereotype. One critic, for example, wrote in the 1770s that the Irish gentry “enjoy their possessions so thoroughly, and in a manner so truly Irish, that they generally become beggars in a few years’ time, by dint of hospitality and inadvertence.” Even in an age when, as we have seen, many of

the English and Scottish landlords were rejecting customary relationships for contractual profits, the lack of a sense of paternal responsibility among the Anglo-Protestant landed elite was striking.

Although the landlords ultimately depended on English power and thought of themselves as part of English culture, they could be quite aggressive in defense of their political interests as Irishmen. This was the inevitable result of the fact that the British tended to treat them as colonials. Various Irish MPs and publicists claimed that the Irish Parliament was the coequal of the British Parliament, but the facts spoke otherwise. Clearly subordinate to both the British Crown and the British Parliament, the Irish Parliament was more like an American colonial assembly than like the pre-1707 Scottish Parliament. The lord lieutenant, a British official, was the chief executive in Ireland. Because he was responsible to the British government, the Irish Parliament could not turn him out, no matter how unpopular his administration. The lord lieutenant's principal task was to ensure that the Irish Parliament regularly passed bills of supply to pay for the administration of Ireland, including approximately twelve thousand troops of the British army kept in Ireland.

In 1719, by a declaratory act called the Sixth of George I, the British Parliament asserted unequivocally its right to legislate for Ireland, yet even before the passage of this act, the British Parliament at Westminster had legislated directly for Ireland. In 1699, for example, the English Parliament responded to complaints of English woolen manufacturers by passing an act prohibiting the export of Irish woolens to any country except England, where they were already subject to prohibitory duties. As a result, the fledgling Irish woolen industry died.

The Irish Parliament was even more unrepresentative than was the British, as well as limited in its powers. No Catholic could sit in Parliament, and after 1727, no Catholic could vote. The exclusively Anglican electorate was very small, and parliamentary constituencies were even more subject to influence and bribery than in England. The Irish Parliament technically could initiate no legislation. During the seventeenth century, however, Parliament had developed some power of initiative through the practice of passing *heads of bills*, which were statements of intention to legislate. Either the lord lieutenant or the king could reject or alter such a bill, and if a bill were so altered, the Irish Parliament could only accept it or reject it in the new form. In Ireland, then, the Patriot movement had to be directed toward making Parliament effective within its own sphere.

ECONOMY, LAND, AND POTATOES

The overriding fact of eighteenth-century Irish social history was chronic poverty. Ireland's economic development did not reach the level attained in England or Lowland Scotland, though it was to improve sharply in the last few decades of the century. The market system for the exchange of goods was inadequate and would continue to be so until well past the middle of the nineteenth century. Both coins and paper money were scarce, especially in the western regions, and barter was still used in all parts of the island. Agriculture remained relatively backward. Peasants' squalid cabins, hardly more than mud huts, littered the countryside, and beggars crowded the towns. As Jonathan Swift, Anglican dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, wrote in 1726: "The whole country, except the Scottish plantation in the north, is a source of misery and desolation, hardly to be matched this side of Lapland."

The fundamental cause of the problem was that many Irishmen had no economic resort except the land. There was not enough commercial or economic development to absorb excess rural population or to give peasants some alternative to farming. The lack of commercial growth itself had multiple causes. Ireland had little in the way of mineral resources, and absentee landlords tended to divert capital to England. The infrastructure of educational, banking, and transportation facilities was totally inadequate. The great mass of the population had not adopted a consumer orientation, and the landed elite showed little of the English or Lowland Scots' commercial instincts. In sum, the backwardness of the Irish economy itself created an inertia that resisted expansion.

British policy also contributed to Ireland's poverty. The export of cattle to England had been cut off in the 1660s, and the export trade in woolens was ruined in 1699. By various acts of the British Parliament in the 1700s, Britain damaged promising growth in brewing and glassmaking. Thus, only two economic activities other than farming developed to any extent before the 1770s: linen manufacturing and the provision trade. Irish linens did not compete with any major British industry and so were encouraged to grow, especially in Ulster, where French Huguenot settlers brought their skill and capital. The provisioning of ships with beef, butter, hides, and the like was a product of the agricultural sector that could thrive on the expanding colonial trade; hence, the provision trade contributed to the prosperity of southern Irish coastal towns such as Cork.

Much of the Irish population, over 90 percent of whom lived in rural areas, thus depended almost exclusively on agriculture for a living. Yet Irish agriculture, even by the standards of the traditional segment of English farming, was very backward. The English observer Arthur Young figured in the 1770s that Irish farming in some respects lagged two hundred years behind England's agriculture. Tools were relatively primitive—the clumsy wooden plow, the spade, and the sickle were the peasant's main implements. *Drawing by the tail* rather than by harness still was the means by which peasants used horses to pull plows and harrows. Landlords rarely undertook improvements on their estates and usually allowed leases for short periods only. If a tenant made an improvement on his holding, he was likely to find his rent raised accordingly. Living in almost complete ignorance of scientific farming methods and without capital or security of tenure, the peasants themselves rarely made improvements to their land. Yet the landlords were always able to find tenants to bid up the rent and often let holdings by a kind of auction to the highest bidder—a system known as *rackrent*. As Lord Chesterfield, a man of no great humanitarian sympathies, wrote, "The poor people of Ireland are used worse than negroes" (that is, slaves).

Only in Ulster were these conditions avoided. There, by the so-called Ulster custom, the tenant was recognized to have some salable interest in his holding. This custom generally took two forms. First, the tenant's occupancy itself could be sold. Thus, if a tenant wished to sell his occupancy to another, he could; or if the landowner wished to evict a tenant, he felt obliged to buy the tenant's right to occupancy. Second, a tenant was entitled, at the time of eviction or the sale of his right to occupancy, to collect the full value of any improvements that he had made. If a tenant built a fence or drained a bog, then the value of that improvement was his. Ulster custom gave the tenant some sense of security and encouraged improvements. Not surprisingly, rents were paid more regularly in Ulster, and farming was more efficient than in the rest of the country.

All over Ireland, unlike in England, tenancies tended to become increasingly subdivided; hence, the land was let in ever smaller parcels. In England, the landlords believed that it was in their own interest to honor the customary size of holdings or even to increase them. But in Ireland, where landlords normally were interested *only* in rental income, they leased their land to *middlemen*, who then sublet to the tenants. The middlemen—easily the most hated group in Ireland—wanted only immediate profit and so promoted subdivision of holdings. By custom, the tenant provided for each of his sons by separating pieces of his holding until there was very little left.

The novelist Maria Edgeworth, whose father owned an estate in Longford, wrote:

Farms, originally sufficient for the comfortable maintenance of a man, his wife and family had, in many cases, been subdivided from generation to generation; the father giving a bit of land to each son to settle him. . . . It was an absolute impossibility that the land should ever be improved, if let in these miserable *lots*.

Pressure on the land in Ireland was heightened by population growth. From 2.5 million in 1700, the Irish population rose to 3 million in 1750 and 4.6 million in 1790. It grew fastest in the poorest areas, the South and West. We will see in the next chapter that this population growth was not unique to Ireland, and in that chapter we will look more closely at the causes of population growth.

Suffice it to say here that one factor was an increase in the supply of food, and in Ireland, the nature of the plentiful food supply was simple: the potato, which had been introduced into the British Isles in the sixteenth century, dominated the Irish peasants' diet. The average tenant grew grain for rent and potatoes for food. Easily cultivated and requiring only the simplest tools, the potato was relatively high in nutritional value: one acre devoted to growing potatoes could support eight people. By the latter 1700s, Irish families consumed on average about 280 pounds of potatoes a week—about 10 pounds a day for each adult! In the infertile western regions, many families ate little else. Coupled with buttermilk, some oatmeal, fish (in the coastal areas), and occasionally a little meat, the potato provided an excellent, if monotonous, diet. Travelers in Ireland often remarked on the healthy, strapping appearance of the Irish peasants, as well as their grinding poverty.

Unfortunately, the potato crop sometimes failed, and localized famine was the result. In the years 1727–30, there were four bad seasons in a row, with much consequent suffering. One observer wrote of the old and ill “dying and rotting by cold and famine and filth and vermin.” In 1740–41, conditions were even worse, and a report was made of “roads spread with dead and dying bodies” and of “corpses being eaten in the fields by dogs for want of people to bury them.”

Even in good years, however, the material conditions of life for the Irish peasantry in many regions were extremely low. Regional variations were important: the absolute poverty of the unfortunate souls struggling to scrape a living from the rocky soil of Connaught or the western edges of Munster contrasted with the greater prosperity of regions around Dublin. Throughout Ireland, however, tenants and *cottiers*—agricultural laborers

who held only a few acres and who depended on wages to pay the rent—often lived at the subsistence level. Possessions were sparse and housing primitive. One observer recorded in 1777 that, “upon the same floor, and frequently without any partition, are lodged the husband and wife, the multitudinous brood of children, all huddled together upon the straw or rushes, with the cow, the calf, the pig, and the horse, if they are rich enough to have one.” Amid this riot of smells and noises and a total lack of sanitation or privacy, the Irish peasantry lived in illiteracy and superstition, subject to the whims of weather, disease, and landlords. Yet they were not without the pleasures of hospitality and sociability. Arthur Young has left this indelible picture of Irish peasant life:

... mark the Irishman's potatoe bowl placed on the floor, the whole family on their hams around it, devouring a quantity almost incredible, the beggar seating himself to it has a hearty welcome, the pig taking his share as readily as the wife, the cocks, hens, turkies, geese, the cur, the cat, and perhaps the cow—and all partaking of the same dish. No man can often have been a witness of it without being convinced of the plenty, and I will add the cheerfulness that attends it.

Of course, this cheerfulness disappeared when the potato crop failed, and it masked the violence that bubbled just below the surface of Irish agrarian society. Yet rural violence in Ireland did not usually result from bad growing seasons. It broke out instead when the peasants had reason to feel that the landlords were abusing their power. For instance, in the early part of the century, a well-organized body of men in Connacht killed and mutilated cattle and sheep in protest against the expansion of pasturage. After 1759, when Britain removed its restrictions against the importation of Irish cattle and thus encouraged the spread of pastures, agrarian violence became more serious and widespread. Bands of men known as Whiteboys terrorized the countryside, tearing down fences and killing cattle. They also protested the collection of the tithe. Even in Ulster, Oakboys and Steelboys clashed with landlords over mandatory labor on the roads and over rent increases. Agrarian violence was made a capital crime, and the landlords ferociously combated it. Nevertheless, sporadic rural violence remained endemic, as much a part of popular culture as Celtic legends, harps, and leprechauns.

RISE OF THE PROTESTANT NATION

In retrospect, it is clear that the enormous social and economic gap between the two cultures in Ireland—the Protestant Ascendancy and the native peasantry—created a dangerous fault in Irish society. In the eigh-

teenth century, however, the landlords' disproportionate power allowed them a temporary sense of security within which the seeds of colonial patriotism could take root. British governments actually helped fertilize those seeds by frequently antagonizing the Protestant Ascendancy and unwittingly goading Anglo-Protestant landlords into considering themselves as Irish. In defense of its own interests, the Protestant Ascendancy developed a kind of settler-nationalist identity, which grew into a movement for political autonomy.

This idea originated late in the seventeenth century, when the English had moved to limit the Irish woolen industry. An Irish MP, William Molyneux, published in 1698 a pamphlet (*The Case of Ireland's Being Bound by Act of Parliament in England, Stated*) arguing that Ireland was as separate from England as was Scotland. In 1720, the brilliant essayist and satirist Jonathan Swift urged that Irishmen express their grievances with English policy by boycotting English-made clothes. In 1724 Swift voiced the anger of the Protestant landlords at the high-handed and casual way in which the British government had granted a patent to an Englishman to produce coin for Ireland. He asserted that the people of Ireland were connected to the people of England *only* by having a common sovereign. Moreover, as he was to argue in his savage essay, "A Modest Proposal," *all* the people of Ireland, Catholics as well as Protestants, would be better off if Ireland had more autonomy under the Protestant Ascendancy.

The Irish Protestant Patriot movement crystallized in the 1720s and thereafter kept alive the issue of constitutional relations between Ireland and Britain. The British, always concerned to rule Ireland in the interests of England, remained confident that the Protestant landlords in Ireland would be mindful of their ultimate dependence on British power. The lord lieutenant and his political managers, called *undertakers*, could normally put together a majority for English purposes in the Irish Parliament. The Patriots, however, expressed Irish interests at every turn, and like the Americans, habitually leapt from particular issues to constitutional questions. Separation from Britain was never one of their aims. They sought simply the right of the Irish Parliament alone to legislate for Ireland, whether the topic was taxation, surplus revenue, parliamentary elections, or the penal laws.

The Irish Patriots were well aware of the relevance of American issues to their aims. Because of emigration, many of the Protestants in Ireland had personal ties with America. Further, they recognized that the American protest against taxation without representation was identical to their own concerns. A Dublin newspaper argued: "By the same authority which the



Irish Volunteers Firing a Salute in Lisburn, 1782, by John Carey. *The Volunteers, an almost exclusively Protestant military organization, had become very well armed and trained by 1782. They represented the Irish patriotism of the Protestant Ascendancy.*

British parliament assumes to tax America, it may also and with equal justice presume to tax Ireland without the consent or concurrence of the Irish parliament.” After the American Revolution began, Irish trade suffered, and the Patriots complained loudly about a British embargo on the provisions trade. Irish public opinion sympathized with the Americans. As one Irish Tory declared, “Here there are none but rebels.”

Such discontent coalesced into a potent organization in 1778, when the French entered the war and the British government removed most of the regular army from Ireland to fight elsewhere in the Empire. Fearing a French invasion, the Protestant Ascendancy established volunteer army units to defend the country. These Volunteers were not under the control of the British armed forces or the lord lieutenant. Almost exclusively Protestant—the officers coming from the gentry, the rank and file from Protestant merchants and tenant farmers—the Volunteers represented, as one Patriot said, “the armed property of the nation.” Not content with their defensive role, the Volunteers took up the Patriots’ issues, and especially *free trade*—

that is, removal of British restrictions on Irish trade. They dressed in splendid uniforms made of Irish cloth and paraded menacingly in Dublin and elsewhere. As the sense of crisis grew, Britain's troubles in America proved to be Ireland's opportunity. The Irish Parliament, taking its lead from the Volunteers, demanded free trade and threatened to withhold Irish revenue from the British until its demands were met. The prime minister at the time, Lord North, was in no position to resist, and in 1780, the British Parliament granted free trade to Ireland.

The Patriot movement also accomplished some reform of the penal laws. The liberal spirit of the Enlightenment worked some effect even in Ireland, and as a result, the Irish Parliament during the 1770s passed a series of acts allowing Catholics to own and inherit property on nearly the same basis as Protestants. The Rockingham government that succeeded Lord North's in 1782 believed in accepting measures of reform to stave off social strife and included relief of Irish Catholic grievances in its liberal program. The last of the landholding provisions of the penal laws were abolished, and Catholics were given the right to serve as schoolmasters and teachers. Nevertheless, Catholics still suffered from certain restrictions: Catholics could not vote, Catholic universities were prohibited, and no Catholic could own a horse worth more than five pounds.

In this sense, *Catholic relief* for a time became identical with Irish nationalism, but as the views of the two key leaders of the Patriot movement show, it was an issue that had the potential of dividing the Protestant Ascendancy. The first great leader of the Patriots was Henry Flood (1732–91), a wealthy and well-connected landowner of impressive oratorical ability and one of the few members of the Ascendancy to take an interest in Gaelic literature and language. He was, however, unalterably opposed to granting Irish Catholics any *political* standing. In 1775, Flood accepted office in the Irish administration, and because the administration ruled Ireland in England's interests, he forfeited his standing among the Patriots. His successor as leader, Henry Grattan (1746–1820), remarked that Flood stood "with a metaphor in his mouth and a bribe in his pocket." Grattan was a young lawyer of small stature and awkward mannerisms, but an inspirational and poetic speaker. Unlike Flood, he favored greater toleration for Catholics because, he argued, until the penal laws were relaxed, the British could play the Protestants off against the Catholics: "The Irish Protestant could never be free till the Irish Catholic had ceased to be a slave." Despite such rhetoric, Grattan no more than Flood sought to end the Protestant Ascendancy; for both of them, an autonomous Ireland was still to be a Protestant nation.

After the crisis and triumph of 1778–80, the Patriots moved to consolidate their victories by establishing the sole right of the Irish Parliament to legislate for Ireland. In 1782, a Volunteer convention representing about forty thousand armed men passed a series of resolutions calling for the autonomy of the Irish Parliament in Irish affairs. Irish popular enthusiasm again reached a fever pitch. The new Rockingham ministry in London feared that Ireland might go the way of the American colonies. Therefore, in 1782, the British granted full legislative initiative to Ireland. Thus, the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland not only won (in 1779–80) the same commercial benefits for which Scotland had abandoned its Parliament, but it also (in 1782) gained without fighting the status that most American patriots had sought as late as 1774. This was no small achievement, but it probably would never have occurred if Britain had not faced a general imperial crisis.

GRATTAN'S PARLIAMENT

The period of legislative autonomy in Ireland was to last eighteen years. Because of Grattan's inspirational leadership in winning the rights of the Irish legislature, the period has become known as "the time of Grattan's Parliament." Indeed, Grattan was awarded £50,000 by the Irish Parliament in gratitude for his services. For all their importance, the constitutional arrangements won in 1782 did not grant full *responsible government* to Ireland. This limitation was to put a serious crimp in Irish national development. The constitution of 1782 gave the Irish Parliament sole authority to legislate for Ireland, but it left the Irish executive in British hands. The lord lieutenant remained the chief executive for Ireland, and he was not responsible to the Irish Parliament, but to the British cabinet and Parliament. The British government, which remembered the constitutional difficulties with the Scottish Parliament before 1707 and which had clashed disastrously with the American colonial assemblies after 1763, had no intention of encouraging the development of an independent Irish executive in Ireland. Curiously, the Irish Patriots seem never to have realized the importance of developing their own executive system responsible to the Dublin Parliament, though it is very probable that such a development would naturally have occurred if the period of legislative independence had lasted long enough. But it did not.

Still, the period of legislative autonomy was one of significant achievement for Ireland. The Irish Parliament received credit for the remarkable



Parliament House, Dublin. Parliament House was one of the most imposing examples of the neo-Classical architecture of eighteenth-century Ireland and a symbol of the power of the Protestant Ascendancy.

blossoming of high culture and economic prosperity. The trade concessions that the Patriots had won in 1779–80 paid off in the mid-1780s. Linen manufacturing tripled in volume, the woolen and brewing industries recovered, and Irish trade in general expanded. In 1784, the Irish Parliament enacted the Irish Corn Law (*corn* meaning grain), which offered a bounty to encourage the growing of wheat and caused the expansion of tillage at the expense of pasturage. Moreover, because the Dublin Parliament now really mattered, formerly absentee landlords were more inclined to stay at home. The proportion of rents paid to absentees went down.

Irish prosperity and self-confidence were reflected in the blossoming of Dublin, which took its place as a major capital city in the British Isles. Building in the classical style flourished, and Dublin became (and remains) a splendid monument to Augustan taste. The late eighteenth century saw the construction of a wonderful collection of public buildings in Dublin: the Royal Exchange (1768), the Custom House (1780s), and the Four Courts (1780s) joined Parliament House (1730s) as noble expressions of the Protestant nation's temperament and outlook—serene, confident, haughty, and masterful.

Although the monumental buildings of Dublin testify to the Ascendancy's power, the solid shops and houses of smaller towns throughout Ireland bear witness to an important change in Irish Catholic society: the emergence of Catholics in the middling ranks. The penal restrictions on

Catholic land ownership had tended to funnel enterprising Catholic men and women into commerce. These shopkeepers, pub owners, and small manufacturers benefited from the expansion of trade that characterized the era of Grattan's Parliament, as did the lawyers, doctors, and bankers who serviced them. Educated and ambitious, Catholics of the middling sort increasingly demanded a say in the political life of Ireland.

The majority of Irish Catholics, however, remained linked to the land. Unfortunately, the expansion of commerce that followed the winning of free trade and the founding of Grattan's Parliament did little for the peasantry. The Corn Law of 1784 was supposed to aid the tenants by encouraging tillage, but even it could not solve the fundamental problems of Irish agriculture, nor could it counter the growing pressure exerted on the land by the rapidly increasing population. By the 1780s, competition for tenancies had caused a revival of agrarian violence, especially in County Armagh in Ulster, where the rural terrorism took on a sectarian character. Protestant Peep o'Day Boys and Catholic Defenders fought each other as well as the landlords. Poverty, ignorance, and sectarian bitterness remained the chief features of rural Ireland.

The Irish Parliament itself (and the Patriot movement generally) became bitterly divided over two issues: parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation. Parliamentary reform—abolition of rotten boroughs and extension of the franchise—had by the 1780s become as heated an issue in Ireland as in England. The Volunteers eagerly sought reform because their recruits increasingly came from Protestants in the middling ranks of society who as yet were denied the vote. But the rumbling of rebellion that accompanied the talk of reform frightened the landlords in the Irish Parliament. Parliament rejected reform and thereby broke with the Volunteers.

Granting political rights to Roman Catholics was an even more emotional issue. Like Flood, many members of the Ascendancy believed that, if the Catholics got the vote, they would destroy the liberties of Protestants. Others like Grattan thought that, if the Catholics were *not* brought into the constitution, they might turn to political extremism and eventually destroy Protestant liberties. Once the French Revolution began in 1789, and democratic ideas radiated from Paris throughout Europe, the need to placate the slowly growing middling ranks of Irish Catholics seemed more pressing. The British prime minister, William Pitt the Younger, thought so. Under his pressure, the Irish Parliament in 1793 granted the franchise to the as-yet small number of Catholics possessing the required property qualifications.

But Catholics still were not able to sit in Parliament or hold the highest offices under the Crown.

The French Revolution caused ominous reverberations in Ireland, just as it did in England and Scotland (see chapter 11). Its ideals of toleration, equality, and democracy won support among many Irishmen of middling rank, particularly among the Presbyterians of Ulster, who still were second-class citizens. Liberal and even republican principles were advocated publicly in Belfast and Dublin. At least among urban lawyers and journalists, a desire for an alliance between Protestants and Catholics became a potent force. In 1791, a young Anglican barrister from Dublin, Theobald Wolfe Tone, helped found the Society of United Irishmen, which aimed to bring about political reform and complete religious equality—in one sense, to form a genuine Irish nation, and in another to bring the French Revolution to Ireland. The United Irishmen wanted to enlist Catholics and Protestants alike, and they recruited effectively among the Protestant professional and mercantile ranks. The Irish executive, with the specter of a peasant rising always looming, was alarmed.

The atmosphere in Ireland became even more tense in 1793, when Britain went to war with revolutionary France. The extension of the franchise to propertied Catholics failed to pacify Tone and the United Irishmen. The British government believed that a French invasion and revolution in Ireland were immediate threats. In May 1794, the Irish executive tried to suppress the United Irishmen, but only forced them underground. Tone began plotting to convert peasant unrest into political revolution, and the United Irishmen began to make contact with both the (Catholic) Defenders and French revolutionaries.

At the same time, however, growing political tensions pushed religious hostilities to the surface. As the great geological fault running through Irish society began to shift and crack, the two cultures of Ireland became more polarized than ever. In 1795, rural sectarian violence between Protestant Peep o'Day Boys and Catholic Defenders escalated into large-scale riots. In response, Protestant landlords, many of them Anglicans, founded the Orange Society to defend Protestant Ascendancy. (The choice of *orange* reflected the powerful Protestant folk memory of William of Orange's military triumph in 1689.) Ireland was now caught up in a European struggle. The question was whether the consequent seismic shocks would thwart the further development of Ireland under the guidance of the Protestant nation or propel the development of a united, nonsectarian, democratic Ireland.

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Chapter 10

The Triple Revolution, 1760–1815

The waves of the French Revolution, as we will see, were to pound the British Isles from the 1790s through 1815. As it happened, the British were already experiencing enormous economic and social change in the form of a *Triple Revolution*: agricultural, demographic, and industrial. This three-pronged revolution caused the greatest alteration of life in the British Isles since the prehistoric invention of agriculture. It destroyed the bulwarks of traditional society and transformed Britain into the first “modern” nation in the world. In a sense, British economic and social history from the late eighteenth century to the present has been the working out of the consequences of the Triple Revolution.

Such a massive change cannot be fitted into convenient chronological boxes, nor can it be easily analyzed. Each element in the Triple Revolution had origins that extended far back in time, and none had completed its course in 1815 or even in 1850. Yet each took off in the second half of the eighteenth century and had important results by 1815 or so. To be sure, the elements did not happen at the same time in all parts of the British Isles. But one or another element in the Triple Revolution, and often two or three together, eventually affected nearly every locality in the British Isles; hence, it is safe to say that, because of the Triple Revolution, Britain was a very different place in 1815 than it had been in 1750.

This process of economic and social change is often known simply as *the Industrial Revolution* because the rise of modern, factory-based industry was the most dramatic and visible force in the Triple Revolution. The Industrial Revolution has seized the attention of a great many historians and policymakers alike. It is important, however, to remember that the three prongs of economic and social change occurred simultaneously, roughly speaking, and that they were mutually interactive: each had a major influence on the others. For instance, without the Agricultural Revolution, there would have been no population explosion; without population growth, there would have been no Industrial Revolution; and without

an Industrial Revolution, there would have been no permanent increase in the population. But such simple statements only lead to more difficult questions. Why did population growth *not* result in industrialization everywhere in the British Isles? To what extent were the social disorders of the new industrial cities the result of any one of the three forces? Such are the complex issues to which we now turn.

THE AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION

The Agricultural Revolution began in England and then spread to Wales and Lowland Scotland. We have seen that agricultural innovation in England began as early as the sixteenth century. All of the elements of the Agricultural Revolution—reorganization of land ownership and tenancies, new crops, new patterns of crop rotation, and systematic improvements of livestock breeds—had been introduced by the late seventeenth century. By the early eighteenth century, traditional English open-field agriculture prevailed mainly in the great Midlands grain belt; much of the rest of England already had either been “improved” or turned into pasturage. Hence, the Agricultural Revolution was a long process whereby progressive organization and techniques caught on in different areas at different times. By 1815, it is safe to say, most of the English open-field and the equivalent Scottish systems were gone, and even the Scottish Highlands were yielding to commercial pasturage. If this was not a revolution in the *pace* of change, it was a revolution in *results*. By 1800, the agricultural sector of England and Wales was producing at least 60 percent more than in 1700. Almost everywhere in the British Isles a rational, commercial outlook prevailed in agriculture.

Once underway, the spirit of agricultural improvement took on a momentum of its own. Adoption of new crops and new farming techniques became the fashion among British landlords. The Welsh gentry, and later, the Scottish aristocrats and lairds emulated the English improvers; thus, progressive farming served as an agent of anglicization. English landlords took an active interest in their estates and sponsored local and county fairs to promote new methods of cultivation, new crops, and improved breeds of livestock. They devoured farming journals. Some landowners such as Thomas Coke of Holkham in Norfolk worked diligently to spread the gospel of progressive agriculture to their friends and neighbors. Even George III caught on to this public-spirited fad, involving himself thoroughly in the farms at Windsor and welcoming the nickname of “Farmer George.”

The fashionable interest in improved farming helped make English landlords into more efficient estate managers. The new techniques available for adoption steadily multiplied. For instance, Jethro Tull (1674–1741), a Berkshire squire, advocated the use of sanfoin grass (a good cattle crop that does not exhaust the soil), the seed drill (a tool that provides for greater yield from seed than the traditional broadcast sowing), and French vineyard cultivation (cultivation of fields after as well as before planting). Charles “Turnip” Townshend (1674–1738) promoted the planting of clover and turnips, which restore nutrients to the soil and provide winter feed for animals. Townshend also helped popularize the *Norfolk* (or four-field) *system*, in which wheat, barley or oats, grasses, and turnips were rotated, so that no field ever had to lie fallow. Robert Bakewell (1725–95) advocated a similar rational and experimental approach to animal breeding. A sheep, he said, was simply “a machine for turning grass into mutton.” Such innovations paid off in increased output. By the 1790s, the average yield per acre of wheat had risen from ten to twenty-two bushels per acre, and much higher numbers of heavier livestock were reaching the markets.

The spread of progressive agricultural techniques was accompanied by the controversial practice of *enclosure* (see chapter 3). By 1700, about half of the land in England had already been removed from the open-field system, but in the eighteenth century enclosure acts were passed with increasing frequency: 189 enclosure acts between 1730 and 1760, 926 between 1760 and 179, and 1,394 between 1790 and 1820. Thus, as the historian John Brewer has noted, “A long-term process accelerated to its final climax.”¹

THE POPULATION EXPLOSION

In 1700, one person in the British agricultural sector fed 1.7 people, but in 1800, one person in farming fed 2.5 people. Because the total number of people engaged in agriculture remained about the same, British farming by the latter date obviously was supporting a markedly increased population. Indeed, the British population grew rapidly after 1760; this growth was one of the great social facts of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century social history. As Table 10.1 shows, the British and Irish population grew by about 145 percent in 120 years.

¹John Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997), 625.

Table 10.1: British and Irish Population 1700–1820

	1700	1750	1800	1820
England	5,000,000	6,000,000	8,400,000	11,340,000
Wales	400,000	500,000	587,000	660,000
Scotland	1,000,000	1,256,000	1,608,000	2,100,000
Ireland	2,500,000	3,000,000	5,000,000	7,800,000
Total	9,900,000	10,750,000	15,595,000	21,900,000

Source: Chris Cook and John Stevenson, eds., *The Longman Handbook of Modern British History, 1714–1980* (London, Longman, 1983), pp. 96–97.

Except for Ireland, where there was a terrible setback in the years 1845–48, the population of the British Isles continued to increase throughout the nineteenth century. Thus, the population for the first time broke through the upper limits that had seemed to be set by nature.

The population grew at different rates in different geographical areas. In all parts of the British Isles, population growth was slight between 1700 and 1750, but very marked thereafter. Between 1750 and 1800, the rate of increase in Ireland was clearly greater than in England and two or three times greater than in Scotland. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Irish population grew at a rate unequaled in British history—and it grew fastest in the poorest areas (Munster and Connacht). In contrast, in Scotland, the population growth was concentrated in the comparatively prosperous Lowlands. In England, the population growth was more evenly distributed, but occurred principally in the more prosperous regions—the South and Southeast, the Midlands, and the industrial North and Northwest.

Why did the population of the British Isles grow? Given the different rates of growth and the spotty nature of the statistical data (the first census did not come until 1801), the answers must remain speculative. It is helpful to remember that a number of obstacles traditionally operated to keep population numbers down. First, the great majority of people before 1700 lived at the subsistence level; therefore, a series of poor harvests could cause at least localized starvation and disease. Second, the state of medical knowledge was poor and offered no defenses against killer diseases such as the plague, typhus, smallpox, dysentery, and influenza. These periodically swept through the population and caused great peaks in the death rate. Third, the people themselves exerted some control over population growth by delaying marriage and limiting the number of children within marriage, effectively maintaining a rough equilibrium between the numbers of people and material resources. In pre-eighteenth-century Britain, neither the food supply

nor the number of *slots* available to people—tenancies, cottages, apprenticeships and so on—was very expandable. Thus, in that comparatively static world, both the average age at marriage and the proportion of unmarried women were high.

In the late eighteenth century, in different ways in different places, these obstacles were partly broken down. Whether the resulting increase in the British population was due more to a decreased death rate or to an increased birth rate is hotly disputed by demographers. It seems reasonable to say that both were involved. In England, for instance, the death rate declined from 26 per thousand to 22 per thousand between 1750 and 1850, not because of improvements in either medical practice or public sanitation, but because certain killer diseases, most notably the plague, disappeared from the British Isles for reasons not yet understood. Perhaps it was that the plague-carrying fleas did not take to the brown rat, which seems to have replaced the black rat in the early 1700s. Perhaps there was a natural genetic weakening of the plague bacillus, or perhaps the European population had gradually developed antibodies against the disease. Whatever the reason, the last great outbreak of the plague in Britain occurred in 1667, and typhus also gradually disappeared.

Another factor reducing the death rate was improved nutrition. In Ireland and the Scottish Highlands the potato, and in England and Lowland Scotland general agricultural improvement enhanced the diet of ordinary people. The impact of the potato on nutrition and population growth in Ireland has already been discussed in chapter 9. The potato had much the same benefit in the western Highlands of Scotland and Wales and a lesser effect in England. In England and Lowland Scotland, agricultural progress provided a more diverse and regular diet. Further, because of the improvement of the transport and market systems there, food could be moved more easily from one region to another. Localized famine became less likely because one area could support another. The improvement in nutrition made for a healthier population, one more resistant to disease.

Meanwhile, the birth rate also was increasing in all parts of the British Isles. There was, as far as demographers can tell, no *biological* change—no increase in human fecundity—that might explain the increased birth rate. Rather, more people married earlier, and because couples were together longer, they had more children. In Ireland, poverty was so pervasive that a peasant could not lift himself out of it by thrift or by delaying marriage. Why not marry young? According to one observer, “The only solace these miserable mortals have is in matrimony.” Apparently, Irish couples did not

practice either contraception or abortion, partly because of the teachings of the Catholic church and partly because they saw no reason to. Children contributed to the family economy and when they were older they could be provided for by subdivision of the parents' holding. For these reasons, every discouragement to early marriage and a large number of children failed to operate in Ireland.

A shift to earlier marriage also happened in England and Lowland Scotland, but for different reasons. Between about 1660 and 1760, the population grew slowly, but gradual agricultural improvement kept food prices low. This relatively favorable standard of living seems to have encouraged people to marry younger and to have more children. Likewise, commercial expansion and the growth of domestic manufacturing tended to multiply the number of slots available to young men and women. It slowly became easier for couples to set up households and begin to raise families. Similarly, certain other gradual economic and social changes encouraged comparatively early marriages. The custom of apprenticeship, which delayed marriage for young men, slowly faded in the face of commerce and capitalism. The acceleration of the Agricultural Revolution reduced the number of young people who *lived in* the household of the farmers and correspondingly increased the number who worked for wages. Both trends gave a greater degree of personal freedom to young people and thus contributed to early marriages. For all these reasons, the average age at marriage in England and Scotland declined from twenty-eight years (for men) to twenty-four between 1700 and 1800, and the birth rate rose from 33.8 per thousand to 37.5 per thousand. These trends produced a bulge in the demographic curve in the third quarter of the century. In the absence of traditional checks of famine, disease, and utter economic privation, the population represented by this bulge was able to reproduce, thus causing the demographic curve to soar during the early nineteenth century.

The social consequences of the population revolution can hardly be overestimated. For one thing, the age structure of the population was altered; thus, in England at least, the population on average was significantly more youthful in 1815 than in 1760. For another, this expanded and more youthful population contributed to the further erosion of traditional economic and social arrangements because its teeming numbers put irresistible pressure on customary rents and on traditional artisanal control over wages, standards of work, and entrance into trades and crafts. A third consequence was to help keep real wages (wages in terms of the cost of liv-

ing) down. The economy was expanding in terms of commerce and output, but partly because of the rapid growth of the population—which tended to push prices up and wages down—real wages did not increase until after 1820.

Finally, the growth of the population caused severe overcrowding in both rural and urban areas. The total number of people living in the countryside (excluding Ireland) could grow only slightly; therefore, the surplus population settled in the towns and cities, swelling the urban areas and completely overwhelming urban governments and facilities. In 1750, England had only one town with a population of fifty thousand (London); in 1801, there were eight; in 1851, there were twenty-nine. By 1851, a majority of people in mainland Britain lived in urban areas. In the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century urban areas, housing was miserable, sanitary conditions shocking, and water supplies polluted and insufficient. Mortality rates in the cities actually went up and life expectancy went down. Urbanization in Britain was closely associated with industrialization; yet one should remember that, because agricultural arrangements (outside Ireland) did not allow for a big increase in the rural population, the historic population increase alone would have accounted for much of the misery of the new urban centers. Seen in this light, the Industrial Revolution was a godsend, for eventually it provided the means by which the burgeoning population could be supported and British cities could be made tolerable.

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The Industrial Revolution in Britain is one of the most intensively researched and hotly disputed subjects in all historiography, and rightly so. It now seems clear that the industrialization process began earlier, was more uneven, and worked its effects over a longer period than historians once thought. Still, Britain industrialized before any other nation, and this head start was the principal reason for its preeminent position in the nineteenth century. By 1880—and earlier for most of the population—industrialization altered the way that the British led their lives. It was the process by which Britain broke through to levels of output and consumption unparalleled in human history. Hence, the questions debated by economic and social historians are of great consequence: What were the causes of industrialization in Britain? Why did the British industrialize first, and why in the eighteenth century? What was its impact on the quantity and quality of life?

Let us first define the term *Industrial Revolution*. It implies a vast expansion of the economy by means of the substitution of a factory system for domestic manufacturing: the factory system is based on machines that replace human muscle and multiply the productivity of each worker. *Industrial revolution* or *industrialization*, then, denotes not an *event* but a *process*, by which the economy as a whole is transformed and reaches a level of self-sustained growth. Such a revolution took root and flourished in Britain between about 1760 and 1830, though the seeds were sown well before and though it continued to throw out shoots and branches long past the mid-nineteenth century. In 1750, Britain remained a land of farms, pastures, and commercial towns; by 1830, congested industrial cities clustering around factories housing iron machines driven by steam power were common features of the landscape.

A few figures will give a sense of the magnitude of the change. Industrial and commercial output rose by 50 percent between 1700 and 1750, but increased by more than 160 percent between 1760 and 1800. Between 1750 and 1800, coal production doubled; between 1788 and 1830, iron production increased by more than 600 percent. Between 1760 and 1820, cotton production went up 6,000 percent. Production in all these areas continued to surge upward through the 1800s. Foreign trade also leapt ahead, almost tripling between 1750 and 1820. In domestic manufacturing, the average capital invested per worker was between two and three pounds. But in the cotton mills of 1820, it stood at between forty and fifty pounds per worker. According to one estimate, 750 operatives in a cotton mill produced as much yarn as 200,000 domestic spinners. One lace-making machine operated by two workers could produce as much as 10,000 hand weavers. In short, individual and national productivity in 1820 was far beyond what anyone in 1650 or 1700 might have dreamed. Britain was experiencing, as one observer said, “the accumulation of property beyond all credibility . . . and [it was] rapid in growth beyond what the most sanguine mind could have conceived.”

Yet a note of caution is in order. Industrialization did not affect the whole economy at once. In effect, two different economies—the traditional and the modern—worked side by side during the decades after 1760. The modern economy—including coal mining, iron, engineering, cotton textiles, pottery, and transportation—got rapidly larger, whereas the traditional sector—agriculture, domestic industries, and most trades and crafts—shrank by comparison. Still, by 1820, the industrial sector did not encompass half the economy.

KEY INDUSTRIES: IRON, COAL, AND COTTON

Iron, coal, and cotton were the key industries in the early decades of industrialization. Iron had been produced for many centuries before 1760, but a series of technical obstacles inhibited the iron industry's growth. Traditionally, iron smelters used charcoal as fuel to produce iron ore. The resulting pig iron was impure and brittle, and its impurities could be removed only by repeated hammering in the forge. These processes were slow and expensive. They also required proximity to rivers and forests because water wheels operated the big bellows of the blast furnaces and the huge mechanical forge hammers. In addition, the charcoal which heated the blast furnaces came from the slow burning of wood, and by the mid-eighteenth century, wood was scarce.

Technological breakthroughs opened the way to rapid expansion of iron production. Abraham Darby, a Quaker ironmaster from Coalbrookdale in Shropshire, succeeded in 1709 in substituting coke (from coal) for charcoal in the production of iron. The iron industry slowly adopted the new technique, and thereby put new demands on the transport system for the shipment of coal, stimulating the development of canals and iron barges. Then,

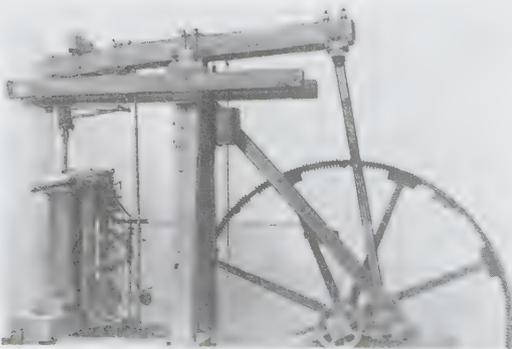


The Iron Bridge at Coalbrookdale, as painted by William Williams. This was the world's first cast iron bridge, a wonderful example of the artistry of the early iron founders.

in the early 1780s, Henry Cort developed processes for rolling and puddling molten pig iron that removed impurities much more quickly than forging. In the 1770s, John Wilkinson, an ironmaster in the Midlands, applied the steam engine to the blast process, liberating iron manufacturers from the need to be near a source of water power. The iron industry took off.

Technological developments also transformed coal production. Miners could not sink coal pits very deep because of drainage problems and because of the difficulty of lifting (*winding*) the coal from coal face to pithead. Moreover, the sheer bulk of coal made transportation difficult; thus, mining was confined either to locations near water transport or to production for a local market. These technical difficulties began to be overcome by the use of the steam engine early in the eighteenth century. Thomas Newcomen designed a commercially useful steam pump that, by mid-century, was widely used for winding; the Newcomen engine, however, was too inefficient to allow for big profits. In 1769, a laboratory technician at the University of Glasgow, James Watt, developed a much more efficient engine by adding a separate condensing cylinder. In 1775, Watt and a Birmingham manufacturer, Matthew Boulton, secured a patent and established a firm to produce Boulton and Watt steam engines. These engines revolutionized British coal mining, solving both the winding and pumping problems. Then, in the 1780s, Watt learned how to turn the reciprocal motion of his engine into rotary motion, thereby making it possible to apply the steam engine to many kinds of machinery, including textile spinning and weaving, and to pulling coal wagons on iron rails—that is, the earliest railways.

Cotton textiles proved to be the most rapidly growing and most typical industry in the British Industrial Revolution. To think of British industrialization is to think of cotton mills. England had long been noted for the manufacture of woolen cloth in the domestic system. Until the eighteenth



Boulton and Watt Steam Engine, late eighteenth century. This kind of engine was perhaps the key machine of the early Industrial Revolution.

century, cotton could offer little competition to wool because raw cotton, grown only in India and North Africa, was too expensive. In the 1770s, however, the southern American colonies began to produce cotton in tremendous quantities, and this cotton was readily available to British merchants. Further, a series of technological innovations made it easier and cheaper to spin and weave cotton fiber: for weaving, the flying shuttle (1733), and for spinning, the spinning jenny (1767), the water frame (1769), and the “mule” (1785).

By the latter 1780s, spinning cotton had been revolutionized. In huge spinning mills, machines turned out thousands of threads at once. Handloom weavers using the flying shuttle multiplied by the thousands to keep up with mechanized spinning. Whole villages turned to weaving cotton cloth in the domestic system. The demand for cheap cotton cloth at home and abroad was insatiable; hence, the early years of mechanization in the cotton industry were also a golden age for handloom weavers. Steam power was eventually applied to weaving as well as spinning, and this shifted weaving from a domestic to a factory industry. Because weavers were reluctant to give up their independence and go into factories, the spread of power looms was slow until 1815. Thereafter, it accelerated. By 1825, nearly 100,000 power looms were in use. By the 1850s, most hand weavers of cotton textiles were gone. Cotton production went forward in great clattering mills of two hundred to three hundred workers each, most of them located in the swollen, soot-blackened “cotton towns” of Cheshire, Lancashire, and the Clyde Valley of southwest Scotland—Manchester, Wigan, Bolton, Bury, Preston, Blackburn, Burnley, Glasgow, Paisley, and so on.

GEOGRAPHICAL SPECIALIZATION

The concentration of cotton production in the English and Scottish cotton towns was typical of the geographical specialization that resulted from industrialization. After the woolen industry industrialized in the 1830s and 1840s, it became concentrated in the West Riding of Yorkshire, where coal was readily available; the older woolen-producing areas—East Anglia, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, and Devon—faded in importance. The coal industry depended on the location of coal deposits, but it continued to be scattered in rural mining villages in the West Midlands (Shropshire and Staffordshire), Derbyshire, the West Riding of Yorkshire, South Wales, and Lowland Scotland. Iron production had been widely scattered before the advent of coke smelting; afterward, it settled in South Wales, Shropshire,



The advance of the Industrial Revolution from 1760 to 1848. The Industrial Revolution in 1760.



The Industrial Revolution in 1848. Cotton manufacturing and coal mining dominated the early Industrial Revolution. By the mid-nineteenth century, England's Midlands and North, the Scottish Lowlands, and southern Wales were heavily industrialized.

Staffordshire, Derbyshire, and Yorkshire. The South of England remained comparatively unindustrialized.

In Ireland, the only province to experience significant industrialization was Ulster. In the Belfast area, linen manufacturing had prospered during most of the 1700s. When Ireland won free trade in the 1780s, Irish merchants got direct access to North American cotton, and the cotton industry then won a foothold in Ulster. Ulster cotton manufacturers were quick to adopt the new technology: the first power-driven machinery in Ireland was used in 1784 in a cotton mill near Belfast. In the 1790s and early 1800s, cotton rivaled linen in Ulster. In the 1820s, however, certain governmental supports to the Irish cotton industry were removed. Without such assistance, Ulster cotton manufacturers could not compete with the English, and they rapidly faded out. The linen industry expanded again to take the cotton industry's place, once again locating in the Belfast region of eastern Ulster. The linen industry constituted the basis of Ulster's prosperity in the 1830s and 1840s. This industrial base distinguished the northern province sharply from the rest of Ireland, which remained largely unindustrialized.

Industrialization in Wales took yet a different form. It occurred slightly later than in England, the key years being 1790–1840. The principal Welsh industry in those decades was iron, as ironworks proliferated in the great South Wales coalfield. This remarkable area included parts of Monmouthshire, Glamorganshire, and Breconshire. Here entrepreneurs (many of them English) found rich iron and coal deposits together in the numerous river valleys that descend from the mountains eastward to the Severn Estuary. By 1839, South Wales was producing over 40 percent of the iron made in England and Wales. The burgeoning iron and coal industries drew in tens of thousands of Welsh peasants as workers, making the population density of the valley communities of South Wales in 1840 as great as anywhere in Britain. This concentration of Welsh-speaking workers played a great part in saving the Welsh language, but it created a volatile situation in which ironmasters and colliery owners spoke English and thought of themselves as part of English life, whereas the vast majority of workers spoke Welsh and remained part of traditional Welsh popular culture.

CAUSES OF INDUSTRIALIZATION

What were the causes of the Industrial Revolution in Britain? Some historians think that the principal cause was technology: innovations in manufacturing drove the whole process. Others believe that the root cause was

population growth: the expansion of the population provided cheap labor, which stimulated entrepreneurs to adopt the factory system. Still other historians have cited external trade, or internal trade, or the availability of capital. But the research of the last fifty years suggests that no one cause was both necessary and sufficient. The Industrial Revolution was a complex process with origins that lay deep in the history of the British economy and society. Therefore, it is useful to think in terms of the *preconditions* for industrialization—factors without which the age-old obstacles to industrial revolution would have remained insurmountable. Yet, even granted the existence of all the preconditions, the Industrial Revolution did not begin automatically, as if by spontaneous combustion. There had to be a significant number of people with the knowledge and the desire to take advantage of the preconditions—entrepreneurs with the right frame of mind to exploit the circumstances.

The preconditions for industrialization can be classified as economic, social, and cultural. In considering the economic preconditions, it is crucial to remember that England and Lowland Scotland had experienced significant economic expansion in the century before 1760. Much of mainland Britain by 1760 had a market economy of a maturity and vitality unmatched in any European nation except the Dutch Republic. A serviceable banking system included the Banks of England and Scotland. The English and Scots in 1707 had established a large free-trade area, with no internal obstacles such as customs duties or political borders to impede the flow of money and goods. By mid-century, the commercial sector of the economy was generating significant amounts of capital that could be mobilized, either through the emerging banking system or through networks of personal contacts. The amount of capital required to set up a small spinning mill or forge was not large—perhaps £500 to £1,000. Such amounts could be raised by an entrepreneur, an ironmaster, or a textile merchant, and then magnified by plowing the profits back into the industry.

Another economic precondition was an adequate level of technology in the appropriate areas—steam power, iron metallurgy, and mechanical devices for spinning and weaving. In fact, the basic technology was available significantly before the late eighteenth century. As we have seen, the innovations initially required were not very complicated and could be produced without a sophisticated scientific education. Very few of the early inventors were scientists: James Hargreaves, who invented the spinning jenny, was a carpenter; Edmund Cartwright, who developed the power loom, was a preacher; many others—including Abraham Darby, Henry Cort, and Josiah

Wedgwood—were businessmen who learned by doing. Nevertheless, scientific knowledge and thought in a general sense were necessary for technological innovation, and here again the British had an advantage. The Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century, which provided the background knowledge, was a Europe-wide phenomenon. Because of the empirical tradition, however, British science tended to be more practical and less abstract than Continental science.

Final economic preconditions included access to raw materials and to potential markets for manufactured articles. Although better endowed with coal and iron than the Dutch Republic, Britain had a supply of natural resources that was not significantly better than that of other European countries. Britain did, however, have exclusive access to one essential raw material—the cotton grown in the southern United States. American independence did not hinder Britain's capacity to exploit this resource. As for potential markets, historians disagree as to whether the external market (including the British Empire) or the internal market was more important. Foreign trade unquestionably expanded more rapidly than production after 1760, and in the cotton industry exports accounted for about one-half of all goods produced. This is not to say that exports *caused* British industrialization, though colonial demand for British manufactured goods undoubtedly accelerated technological innovation. About two-thirds of the goods produced in the modern industrial sector were consumed at home. The growth of the population combined with a relatively high degree of commercialization to generate an extremely powerful domestic demand.

SOCIAL PRECONDITIONS

The issue of domestic demand is related to the domain of *social* preconditions of industrialization. It is apparent that British (or, more specifically, English, Lowland Scots, and Ulster Irish) society was well suited to nourish revolution in industry. How so? The first factor was the population increase. The case of Ireland shows that population growth by itself could not cause industrialization. Rapid population growth can, in fact, inhibit industrialization by creating poverty, dampening demand, and discouraging the adoption of labor-saving devices. By good luck, the British population growth hit just the right level to stimulate domestic demand and provide a large surplus of cheap labor.

The population explosion was a Europe-wide phenomenon; therefore, British society (excluding most of Ireland) seems to have been uniquely

equipped to take advantage of the opportunity when other nations could not. The relatively *open* nature of the British social hierarchy (see chapter 3) explains the difference. In Britain, property brought status, and property could be purchased. This inspired a love of money and a desire to buy the badges of status that went much deeper into the society in Britain than anywhere in Europe except the Dutch Republic. To some degree, the laboring poor had to be taught to desire consumer goods; capitalists such as Richard Arkwright systematically undertook to inculcate acquisitive instincts in their workers. On the whole, however, the desire of each person in Britain to emulate his or her social superiors, and thus advance his or her status, generated a powerful desire for riches. As Adam Smith said, what drove people to economic activity was in the last analysis “the consideration and good opinion that wait upon riches.”

British society also shaped political arrangements in such a way as to encourage economic enterprise and expansion. The landlords, victorious in 1688, established the rule of law. Although they used the law for their own benefit, the rule of law itself supplied a regularity and predictability essential to commercial and industrial initiative. Further, the English landlords established absolute rights of private property because they needed to be able to buy and sell land and exploit their estates. For instance, among the landlords of Western Europe, only the British owned the minerals beneath the soil. This encouraged them, if not to lead the process of industrialization, then at least to cooperate with it, by making capital and mineral resources available (for a price) to entrepreneurs. Moreover, the landlords made sure to limit the state’s interference with their liberties, including the liberty to make money. Thus, out of self-interest, the English landlords and their Scottish imitators created the political conditions suitable for industrialization: the rule of law, individual liberty, relatively low and highly predictable taxes, and a bare minimum of state control over internal economic activity. Finally, it is worth remembering that England, Wales, and after 1746, Scotland, were free from the destruction and turmoil of war fought at home. The comparative unity and security of Britain encouraged economic growth.

CULTURAL PRECONDITIONS

None of these opportunities would have been exploited had there not existed a body of people with the appropriate values and outlook. By the 1700s, Britain had an unusual number of people, each acting on individual

initiative, with the requisite qualities. The reason had to do in part with Protestantism. The Protestant “ethic” of worldly success within any calling, including commerce and industry; of rational application of means to ends; and of divine sanction for human exploitation of nature helped create an atmosphere favoring hard work in the pursuit of worldly success. Such an explanation can be pushed too far. Many Europeans before the Protestant Reformation had pursued riches. Moreover, from a worldwide perspective, Protestantism and Catholicism do not seem very different in their attitudes toward rationality and the manipulation of the natural environment.

Nevertheless, there was in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a rough correlation between Protestantism and economic advancement. Furthermore, in Britain Dissenting Protestants, increasingly called *Nonconformists*, played a special role in promoting values that were essential to capitalism and economic innovation. They also took a prominent part in organizing the early industries. Nonconformists—Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and (later) Methodists—made up less than 10 percent of the population, but almost 50 percent of the most important industrial entrepreneurs. Their moral code encouraged hard work and self-denial. Moreover, their social position channeled them into business. Because they were not part of Anglican landed society, they were second-class citizens, usually relegated to the towns. Their psychological need for economic success was great, as was their practical need, because a Nonconformist could join the elite by making a fortune and buying enough land. Often, a switch to Anglicanism followed a man’s purchase of an estate; meanwhile, Nonconformity had done its work.

To give one example, Jedediah Strutt (1726–97) was a major entrepreneur in the cotton industry. Strutt was a Unitarian, the son of a small farmer. He was apprenticed to a wheelwright in 1740, but after completing his apprenticeship, he returned to farming. However, because of his mechanical skill, Strutt was able to improve the standard stocking frame so that it could be used to knit ribbed stockings. He was not content to apply his innovation to the local cottage industry. Granted patents in 1758–59, Strutt set up a factory in Derby that became extremely lucrative. In 1768, he took into partnership the great inventor Richard Arkwright, who had developed the water frame for spinning cotton threads. Their firm rose to even greater levels of profit. When Strutt died, he left a huge fortune and a fine country estate. His grandson became the first Lord Belper. Strutt had provided his own highly appropriate epitaph: “Here lies JS—who, without Fortune, Family or friends rais’d to himself fortune, family & Name in the World.”

The point is that men like Strutt could see the opportunities presented by the economic situation, and they had the skills and the motivation to take advantage of them. Britain in the 1700s was producing a substantial number of such people—managers of aristocratic estates, ambitious tradesmen, capitalists in the putting-out system of domestic manufacture, and opportunistic commercial captains. They proved to be willing to take the risks necessary not only to expand production, but also to expand it by wholly new means. Thus, the answer to the questions “Why Britain?” and “Why then?” is that both the preconditions for industrialization and a set of people capable of exploiting them came to exist in eighteenth-century Britain, but not elsewhere (at least to the same degree) and not before. Britain’s advantages over wealthy nations such as France and commercialized nations such as the Dutch Republic were not great, but they were enough to give Britain a head start, and that head start was decisive in widening the differential.

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE TRIPLE REVOLUTION

The social consequences of the Triple Revolution were both complex and comprehensive. They did not happen overnight and were to reverberate throughout the whole length of the nineteenth century. Even by 1815, however, British society was being strikingly altered. Some of the effects have already been noted: the substitution of contract for custom in agriculture, the reduction of many small owners and tenants to the status of farm laborers, overcrowding in both rural and urban areas, the erosion by pressure of numbers of customary arrangements in trades and crafts, and the general forcing of real wages down. Now we will factor in the short-run consequences of industrialization and then consider the impact of the whole.

No one would deny that, because of industrialization, the great majority of Britons enjoyed a higher standard of living in 1880 than in 1750. They earned more, consumed more, and lived longer lives. But it is far from clear that industrialization had worked any such beneficial result by 1815. True, the gross national product (GNP—the total of goods and services produced by a nation) doubled in the period from 1760 to 1815 so that, even though the population increased, output per head also increased. Unfortunately, rents and prices also went up markedly, partly because of the war with France from 1793 to 1815. Thus, it would be only after 1815 that average real wages improved over the levels of the 1750s. Moreover, to estimate standards of living in terms of averages is misleading. For instance, there is good reason to believe that, during early industrialization, the distribution of

income shifted away from wages and toward profits. In other words, the share of the national income enjoyed by the rich grew at the expense of the share going to the poor. The expansion of economic opportunities caused the middling sorts to proliferate. It would have been cold comfort to an artisan whose wages were falling because of competition with factories to know that statistically the per capita national income was going up or that commercial and industrial captains were prospering.

The increase or reduction of an individual's actual standard of living depended in large part on his or her occupation. Overcrowding in the countryside kept wages low and work irregular for most farm laborers. Factory workers were relatively well paid because most working men disliked factory work and had to be enticed into it by higher wages. Women and children, who dominated the early factory labor force, were paid less than men. Moreover, by 1815, only about 35 percent of the British labor force worked in industry, and the percentage actually working in factories was much smaller yet.

Craftsmen (and women) whose skills were in demand—printers, cabinet makers, cutlers, blacksmiths, engineers, and cotton spinners—benefited from industrial expansion. These, however, remained a small minority of the work force. Other craftsmen who had to compete with the machines or who could not protect their trades from the rising tide of population—wool combers, calico printers, wool shearers, and handloom weavers—suffered acutely from falling wages. The handloom weavers constituted the most tragic case. At their peak in the late 1700s, the weavers numbered about four hundred thousand men, earning an average of twenty-three shillings a week. By the 1830s, the weavers averaged five shillings a week, and their numbers had been cut in half. On balance, in the period from 1760 to 1815, probably more workers suffered in standard of living because of the Industrial Revolution than gained from it.

The Industrial Revolution affected more than material standards of life. The family, for example, was in some ways profoundly changed. It was not that industrialization altered the structure of the family from extended to nuclear; the basic pattern of the family in England, at least, had been nuclear from the earliest times for which there is evidence. Nor did industrialization initiate women's and children's labor. Among the laboring people, they had always worked. But industrialization tended to break up the old pattern of families working cooperatively in the home. For one thing, industrialization caused a *de-skilling* of many traditional occupations, as machines did the

work formerly done by human beings, and, in particular, machines tended by women did the work formerly belonging to men. Many artisans under this pressure responded by reemphasizing the male exclusivity of the work—and, all too often, vented their frustration by beating their wives.

For another, as industrialization shifted manufacturing work from the home to the factory, it changed the nature of work for many women. In the preindustrial world, spinning at the wheel, for example, had always been women's work. But in the new mills that were devoted to cotton spinning by large spinning machines, men took over spinning, and women and children were relegated to auxiliary tasks such as piecing yarn and cleaning the machines. As women lost access to spinning, many took up weaving, formerly reserved to men, so that by 1800 perhaps half of all handloom weavers were women. And in the case of weaving, women retained employment when power looms were introduced and gathered into factories. In the early nineteenth-century weaving factories, men usually worked as *tenters* (power loom mechanics) whereas women operated the looms. But whatever the change in men's versus women's work, industrialization undermined the traditional family economy.

It can be argued that industrialization helped emancipate women by increasing their opportunities for work outside the patriarchal family, but the facts appear to argue otherwise. Certainly, factory owners recruited women and children whenever possible, both because their hands were smaller and more nimble than men's, and because they were more easily disciplined and could be paid less than men. In general, industrial capitalists avoided paying adult males if they could. In 1835, more than 60 percent of all cotton mill workers were women and children. Moreover, women slaved underground in some coal mines and on the surface of most lead mines. The contribution of female workers was crucial if their families were to survive. But the standard pattern was for girls to work in the factories until marriage, after which they were confined to household duties and to such domestic work as sewing or straw-plaiting to make ends meet. Only a quarter of all women working in factories in the early nineteenth century were married. At the same time, attitudes among the upper orders, especially in the middling sorts, were hardening about what constituted proper women's work. Women who worked for a living outside the home gradually came to be regarded as lacking virtue and morality because, it was increasingly assumed, a woman's proper place was in the home where she would be provided for by an adult male.



Woman and child dragging a basket of coal in a mine. From the Report of the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children in the Mines, 1842.

All of the workers—men, women, and children—in the early Industrial Revolution were subjected to severe discipline. The laboring poor were used to working at their own (or nature's) pace and rhythms. But in the new industries, the work force had to be *tamed*—that is, it had to be subjected to the pace of the machines, which represented too great an investment to stand idle. With the advent of the factory came a culture of time—clocks, steam whistles, and factory bells. Time became something that was to be *saved* and *spent*, not *passed*. Factory owners adopted a variety of insistent devices to discipline their preindustrial workers: educational exhortations and warnings, code books, clocks, fines, corporal punishment, and dismissals. Rule books of hundreds of precise orders were not unusual. Workers arose before dawn by the factory whistle; went to work by the whistle; ate breakfast, lunch, and dinner by the whistle; and at the end of a fifteen-hour day slogged home in the dark after the final whistle.

The Industrial Revolution—indeed the Triple Revolution as a whole—transformed social relations, the way that people related to each other in the work place and in society generally. As the sheer number of people grew, as they coagulated in the dense and harsh new urban environment, as contract replaced custom in the countryside, and as the factory replaced the household in the manufacturing sector, the face-to-face relations of the preindus-

trial world crumbled. The towns in which an increasing number of people lived and the institutions in which they worked became larger, more complex, and less manageable. Although some factory owners adopted paternalist policies in managing their workers, the way that employers and employees related to each other inexorably became more formal—more rule bound, contractually defined, and bureaucratic. Because landed proprietors and factory owners alike were driven by the pressure of competition and the fear of failure, social relations with the work force became harsher. The laboring poor on their part were driven to try to defend their customary rights and independence, as well as their standards of living, from the pressures applied by property owners and the marketplace.

Eventually, the worsening of social relations helped produce a new kind of social structure—namely, a class society. But because the formation of social classes in Britain occurred during the highly politicized atmosphere of war against revolutionary France, that process will be discussed in chapter 11. What must be emphasized at this point is that the Triple Revolution greatly intensified social conflict. In one locality after another, by efforts that were not at first coordinated or even understood in a national context, working men and women strove to protect their wages, working conditions, and preindustrial community. They petitioned Parliament, formed local *combinations* (unions), issued threatening letters and manifestoes, and went on strike. Employers reacted by refusing to hire workers unless they agreed not to join workers' combinations. They also resorted to Parliament to obtain laws that would control the laboring poor. By 1799 Parliament had passed more than forty laws against trade unions; in 1799–1800, it passed the Combination Laws, which prohibited any industrial combination whatsoever.

Two dramatic sets of events, the Luddite movement and the Swing Riots, illustrate the intensity of the social conflict resulting from the Triple Revolution. Luddism is the name given to machine-breaking activities that erupted in the Midlands, Lancashire, and the West Riding of Yorkshire in 1811–12 and again in 1814–16. Crowds of working men and women who believed that new machines were threatening their traditional crafts and livelihoods conducted secret operations to smash the machines and intimidate the factory owners. Often they issued proclamations signed by “Ned Ludd” or “General Ludd.” Several factories were attacked by Luddites and defended by armed mill owners. Frustrated by the failure of their petitions to Parliament and by the authorities' suppression of their unions, the Luddites turned to machine-wrecking as a way of demanding restoration of the traditional *moral economy*, a return, in other words, to more customary

Mr Wymers
 late foreman of a jury held
 at Nottingham 16 March - 12
 Sir
 by General Ludds Express Express
 Commands I am come to -
 Workshop to enquire of your Character
 towards our cause and I am sorry
 to say I find it to correspond with
 your conduct you lately shewed -
 towards us, Remember the
 time is fast approaching when
 men of your stamp will be
 brought to Repentance, you may
 be called upon soon, Remember -
 you are a marked man
 your for Gen Ludd
 a true man

A threatening letter from General Ludd to the foreman of a Nottingham jury, March 1812. The writer warns: "Remember the time is fast approaching when men of your stamp will be brought to Repentance."

and reciprocal economic arrangements and the guarantee of a fair day's wage for a fair day's labor. Thus, they were heirs on a wider and more dangerous scale of the food rioters of the eighteenth century.

Much the same can be said of the Swing Rioters, who struck at threshing machines, burned hayricks, and issued threatening proclamations throughout the South, Southeast, and Midlands of England. Agrarian change had produced sporadic riots and machine breaking during the years before 1830. But "Captain Swing," as the rioters named their fictional leader, swept through the countryside like wildfire in 1830–31. Sometimes the agricultural laborers who rioted were seeking to abolish threshing machines (which deprived them of winter work) and sometimes simply to raise wages to a livable standard. The Swing Rioters were not seeking political or social revolution—though the property owners thought so—but wished to force the landowners to acknowledge once again their traditional paternal obligations. Like the Luddites, they were attempting to stop the erosion of traditional society, and like the Luddites, they failed.

The Luddites and the Swing Rioters can be seen as indices of the social effect of the Triple Revolution. By the early nineteenth century, the agricultural, demographic, and industrial revolutions were transforming life in Britain. Output and productivity were increasing by leaps and bounds so there existed the potential for an improved standard of living for a rapidly growing population. The Triple Revolution was also causing acute social conflict. Already threatened by an Irish uprising and engulfed by an economic and social revolution, Britain in the last years of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth century now found itself buffeted by revolutionary winds from France.

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Chapter 11

The War Against the French Revolution, 1789–1815

The pressures on the British ruling elite generated by political developments in Ireland and by economic and social change in the United Kingdom were acutely intensified by the French Revolution. This violent transformation, which gripped all of Europe for a quarter of a century, began in the summer of 1789 and seemed to surge with breathtaking speed from one event to the next: the calling of the Estates General; the formation of a National Assembly; the fall of the Bastille to a Parisian crowd; the rebellion of the peasantry; the issuance of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen; the articulation of a radical ideology—liberty, equality, and fraternity; the flight of King Louis XVI; war; the execution of the king; and the Reign of Terror. Almost immediately on its outbreak, the French Revolution began radiating its ideals of democracy and nationalism in waves that threatened to swamp all of the European states of the old regime.

The aristocratic regimes of Europe found their rule shaken by a dual conflict: by war with French armies abroad and by ideological struggle with radical movements at home. Armed conflict between revolutionary France and reactionary states began in April 1792, when France declared war on Austria and Prussia, and it was to go on ferociously if sporadically until Napoleon's final defeat in 1815. Britain stood apart from the war at first, but soon aligned itself with the reactionary powers and eventually became the principal and most consistent opponent of the French Revolution. At several times, the struggle of the British ruling elite with the revolution abroad and at home became desperate. Yet the oligarchy survived and was able to bring about the defeat of France. Three important questions arise from these facts: (1) Why did Britain, the most progressive state of Europe, throw its weight with the reactionary powers? (2) Given the dangerous state of affairs in the

British Isles, how was the British oligarchy able to survive the challenge? (3)
 What were the consequences of the war effort on British society?

WILLIAM PITT THE YOUNGER AND NATIONAL REVIVAL

The answer in part to all three questions had to do with the extraordinary character and ability of William Pitt the Younger, prime minister from 1783 to 1801 and again from 1804 to 1806. The second son of the great earl of Chatham (William Pitt the Elder), Pitt inherited many of his father's talents and ideas. Like his father, he was a man easy to respect but hard to love. Born in 1759, Pitt the Younger was reared in an atmosphere of worship for Chatham's oratorical genius and statesmanship. Doted on by his parents, he was trained for distinction in public life and was convinced of his own surpassing ability and virtue. He was educated at home and at Cambridge and seems to have skipped adolescence. He emerged from the university with a mature understanding of the classics, mathematics, and modern literature, as well as a unique self-assurance. A boon companion to a small circle of friends, Pitt by age twenty-one displayed icy self-control in his public demeanor. He was an unnaturally mature statesman before most young men have found their way in life.



Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger addressing the House of Commons on the French Declaration of War, 1793, by K. A. Hickel. Pitt was thirty-four at the time.

Pitt was returned to Parliament in 1781 from Appleby, a pocket borough controlled exclusively by a wealthy patron. Despite his position as a client, Pitt rapidly won a reputation as an independent reformer. From his first speeches, he impressed the House of Commons with his mastery of detail, his clarity of mind, and his debating skill. By advocating parliamentary reform, by criticizing the war in America, and by attacking the corruption and incompetency of Lord North's government, Pitt earned a commanding position as a *patriot*—a man working above party for the national interest. In 1782, only eighteen months after first taking his seat, Pitt became chancellor of the exchequer.

Scarcely a year later, Pitt became prime minister at the age of twenty-four. The events leading to his elevation were among the most convoluted and controversial in modern British political history. As we saw in chapter 8, Lord North's unpopular government was replaced in 1782 by a ministry devoted to peace and headed by the marquess of Rockingham. The key figure in this new government was Charles James Fox, a brilliant orator, urbane leader of fashionable society, and outspoken defender of civil liberty. Fox believed in reducing the patronage of the Crown and in the right of Parliament's leaders to form their own cabinet, regardless of the king's views. These ideas clashed with the constitutional arrangements of the day (though they eventually became accepted political practice and thus part of the unwritten British constitution). When Rockingham died suddenly in July 1782, Fox tried to implement his novel constitutional claims, but George III rejected them and Fox resigned. The earl of Shelburne, a Whig in the Chatham (Pitt) camp, formed a government. Fox took his revenge by cynically forming an alliance with his former archenemy Lord North, and toppling Shelburne's government. This move forced George III to accept what he and all independent politicians, including Pitt, regarded as a corrupt ministry, the Fox-North coalition.

Eager to dismiss this ministry, the enraged monarch found his opportunity in 1783, when Fox introduced a bill to reform the government of British India. George III let it be known that he would consider as an enemy anyone who supported the bill. That was sufficient to kill it; the bill's rejection overturned the Fox-North coalition, and George III invited the young Pitt to form a new cabinet. Whig doggerel commented:

A sight to make surrounding nations stare;
A Kingdom entrusted to a school-boy's care.

Because the new ministry lacked majority support in the House of Commons, the Foxites declared it an expression of royal tyranny. Both Pitt and

George III, however, were content to have the government rely exclusively on the king's confidence, certain that the electorate supported them. They proved to be right. In 1784, Pitt called a general election. With the liberal application of funds from the Crown and from the East India Company, but also relying on his reputation as a patriot and reformer, Pitt swept to a big victory. In the process, he earned the abiding hostility of Fox, who regarded himself as the "tribune of the people" and a "martyr" for popular liberty. In truth, Pitt's victory revealed the political nation's unhappiness with the cynicism of the Fox-North coalition and its support for George III's view of the constitution.

In the next eight years Pitt rebuilt the governmental machinery that the war against the American colonies had overstrained. Having at last found a first minister in whom he trusted and who was also effective, George III supplied steady support. For his part, Pitt did not press issues likely to upset the king. He supported bills to abolish slavery and to reform Parliament, but when they were defeated, he let them go. At the same time, Pitt resolutely pursued governmental efficiency. He gradually improved the civil service by appointing competent professional administrators. He abolished sinecures (functionless state offices), rationalized administrative departments, substituted government salaries for private fees, and opened government financing and contracts to competitive bidding. All this earned Pitt the image of a cold-hearted bureaucrat, but it also enabled the British state to withstand the shocks of the war and social change to come.

Pitt also renovated government finances. The American war had driven the national debt to an unprecedented level, and the disruption of trade had cut into government revenues. Pitt had learned from Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* that free trade and reduction of governmental encumbrances would actually increase commerce and the state revenue from it. At one public dinner, he declared to Smith himself, "Nay, we will stand until you are seated, for we are all your scholars." Thus, he promoted British commerce and negotiated a mutual reduction of duties on trade between Britain and France. He made smuggling unprofitable by cutting import duties drastically—and then aggressively collected the remainder. He concocted a long list of new items to be taxed, including racehorses, carriages, servants, windows, and hair powder. He invented a national lottery, and he established a *sinking fund* to reduce the national debt—an appropriation of £1 million that was allowed to accumulate at compound interest, which was used to repay the debt. He also introduced a system of accounting in government

finances. By 1792, Pitt's measures had restored public confidence, for they had increased governmental income by 50 percent and had decreased the national debt by £10 million. By the time the French Revolution began, the British state had revived from the dangerous ailments of the American war years.

ORIGINS OF THE WAR WITH FRANCE

The outbreak of the French Revolution presented Pitt with a new set of challenges and eventually turned his tenure of office into a nightmare. At first, the British received the news of revolutionary events with complacency. Weren't the French simply trying to accomplish what the English had done in 1688? Fox said the fall of the Bastille was "much the greatest event that ever happened in the history of the world." Pitt himself declared that the convulsions in France would eventually calm down, and then France "will enjoy just the kind of liberty which I venerate." Young poets such as William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge greeted the French revolution as if it were the great news of human liberation. In Wordsworth's famous words,

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven!

Another poet, Robert Southey, declared that the Revolution meant "the regeneration of the human race."

This complacency, however, soon turned into ferocious controversy. Events in France not only rapidly assumed a visage frightening to the British oligarchy, but they also inspired radical reform movements at home. In Ireland, the principles of the French Revolution led to the formation of the United Irishmen. In England, the French Revolution reinvigorated and broadened the reform movement that had originated during the Wilkesite controversy of the 1760s and that had applied significant pressure to the government during the war against the American colonies.

Moreover, because of the rapid social and economic changes of the late eighteenth century—population growth, industrialization, urbanization, and social conflict—hopes for constitutional reform penetrated more deeply into British society than ever before. Thus, whereas organizations such as the Society of the Friends of the People (1792) were aristocratic, most other reform organizations grew from the middling and artisanal ranks. The Revolution Society, for instance, had been founded by urban Nonconformists to

celebrate the centenary of 1688 and now called for repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and affirmation of the sovereignty of the people. Similarly, the Society for Constitutional Information, originally established in 1771, and re-formed in 1780 to promote the ideals of popular sovereignty and peace with the American colonies, was revived in 1789 by business and professional people such as John Cartwright and John Horne Tooke and included a few artisans and craftsmen. Broadly speaking, the objective of all such societies was *moderate* parliamentary reform—abolition of rotten boroughs, redistribution of seats to provide for more fair and independent representation, and extension of the franchise.

More ominous, from the vantage point of the oligarchy, was that thousands of artisans and shopkeepers in London and the provincial towns began on their own to organize and demand *radical* constitutional change: universal manhood suffrage, annual elections, and constituencies of equal size. Of these groups the most important was the London Corresponding Society (LCS), formed in 1792 by shoemaker Thomas Hardy. Such societies did not mean to establish a republic, but they did associate themselves with the French Jacobins and criticized the principle of aristocracy. As was typical of British reformers, the radical artisans talked in terms of “*restoring*” lost liberty, but that restoration would have overturned oligarchical rule; it would mean, the LCS declared, “the press free, the laws simplified, judges unbiased, juries independent, needless places and pensions retrenched, immoderate salaries reduced, the public better served, taxes diminished and the necessaries of life more within the reach of the poor.”

The inflow of revolutionary ideas caused a strenuous ideological dispute in Britain. In 1789, the dissenting minister Richard Price celebrated the French Revolution by comparing it to the Glorious Revolution of 1688. His sermon provoked Edmund Burke, the leading Whig intellectual, into writing a sustained attack on the French Revolution, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). This brilliant polemic became the chief statement of growing counterrevolutionary movement in Britain and has remained a powerful influence in British conservatism to the present day. Burke argued that the events of 1688 and 1789 had nothing in common. Whereas the English in 1688 had revered the past and therefore had taken care that their actions were consistent with tradition, the French in 1789 broke with their past and sought to create a new political order according to pure reason. History, Burke contended, is a safer guide in human affairs than reason, for the principles of societal arrangements are, “like every other experimental science, not to be taught *a priori*.” Experience, as the English knew, teaches

better than an abstract Rights of Man. The propensity of the French to follow abstract rights must lead to destruction of the monarchy, debasement of the currency, anarchy, and tyranny.

Events in France were to make Burke's argument seem more and more correct, but *Reflections* aroused great fury among British radicals. One of the earliest replies came from Mary Wollstonecraft, whose *Vindication of the Rights of Man* (1790) condemned Burke's inconsistency in supporting the American but not the French Revolution and insisted that all human institutions and customs, including marriage, must be subject to rational scrutiny. This work led to Wollstonecraft's far more famous publication, *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in which she argued for women's education and political rights as the only means of ensuring that all of human society reached its full potential.

The most sensational of the radical responses to Burke, however, came from Tom Paine, who had played such a crucial role in the American independence movement. In *The Rights of Man* (1791–92), Paine argued with unequaled clarity and simplicity for a complete break with the past: "It is the living, and not the dead, that are to be accommodated." Reason, not tradition, should form the basis of society and constitution. In truth, he said, the vaunted British constitution merely defends inequality and injustice. Reason says that all people have natural rights. The British constitution, however, denies natural rights in order to protect a hereditary monarchy and aristocracy, of which the former is useless and the latter degenerate. In contrast, a *representative democracy* (that is, a republic), Paine argued, would bring real benefits to all the people. It would eliminate corruption and waste and install a progressive income tax. These reforms would pay for material improvements such as family allowances, education grants, old age pensions, and funeral expenses. Such arguments made *The Rights of Man* the bible of popular radicalism in Britain; indeed, it helped thousands of people among the laboring poor to understand their common experiences and aspirations and so begin forming a *working class consciousness*. More concretely, Paine gave radicalism a positive program: destruction of the oligarchy, enactment of universal manhood suffrage, and the foundation of a welfare state.

The spread of radical societies and the popularity of Paine's tract increasingly worried George III and his government. Radicalism seemed to suggest that poor laborers might throw off their habits of deference and obedience. In May 1792, the king issued a "Proclamation Against Seditious Writings." At the same time, Pitt said that under the circumstances any

further effort at parliamentary reform would cause anarchy and confusion. Nevertheless, Pitt remained more concerned about the traditional balance of power in Europe than about embarking on an ideological crusade against the French Revolution. Even when Austria and Prussia went to war against France in 1792, Pitt did nothing. But French encroachment on the Low Countries, through which the British had their commercial entrepôt to the Continent, dragged him toward war. Already in 1788, Pitt had arranged a triple alliance with the Dutch Republic and Prussia to defend the Low Countries. When in 1792, France defeated the Austrians, opened the river Scheldt to French commerce, and then annexed the Austrian Netherlands (roughly, modern Belgium), Pitt and his government decided to go to war with France.

WAR WITH FRANCE, 1793–1798

Pitt little anticipated that the war begun in 1793 would continue almost without interruption until 1815. He thought that the Revolution had so weakened France that the war would not last long, and he viewed it as a chance to make up for British losses in the New World between 1775 and 1783. Indeed, he saw the war in terms made popular by his father: the British would pick up French colonial holdings around the world by use of their peerless navy, while buying mercenaries from the small German states and paying subsidies to larger allies such as Austria and Prussia to divert French energy and resources to the Continent. The British regular army in 1789 was, as usual, relatively small, and it remained under the thumb of the aristocracy, who, regardless of any lack of competency, purchased their commissions and raised their own regiments. About twelve thousand of the fifty thousand troops were stationed in Ireland, and eighteen thousand others were in the colonies overseas. But Pitt had done much to refurbish the navy, and it stood capable of fairly rapid expansion. Pitt and his chief strategists thought that, as long as the government could raise the funds to maintain the army, subsidize the Continental allies, and keep the navy afloat, Britain could not lose.

The problem was that Pitt's strategy was vulnerable on two points. First, Britain's main Continental allies—Austria, Prussia, and Russia—as yet understood no better than the British that they were fighting a new kind of opponent. Consequently, they paid too much attention to their individual territorial ambitions, especially in Poland, over which they competed greedily. The first coalition against France (1793–97) organized by the British was

at best a loose collection of headstrong dynastic states, with no common strategy or integrated command.

The second weak point was that France was a new kind of nation conducting a new kind of war against traditional eighteenth-century states. France rapidly became a society mobilized for war—a *nation in arms*. The French revolutionary armies were not the comparatively small professional armies of the eighteenth century but the product of the *levée en masse* (conscription) and fervent patriotism. The officer corps, purged of its aristocratic element, became a force organized by merit and courage as opposed to birth and social position; the rank and file became a mass of men motivated by nationalism and democratic ideology. The French armies struck with shocking enthusiasm, and they aimed not at winning prizes to be traded later at the negotiating table, but at total defeat of the enemy. Further, the French were assisted by political radicals and ethnic nationalists within each of the conservative powers. The French Revolutionary War, therefore, was a struggle between a modern society and a number of traditional societies. The British landed oligarchy almost failed to meet this challenge, but in the end it was able to do so by harnessing the economic power of Britain's own modern sector—industry and commerce.

The war went badly for Britain during the first five years. The French threw the allied forces (including British expeditionary units) out of France and moved into the Rhineland and Northern Italy. Then in 1794–95, they conquered the Dutch Republic, dealing a severe blow to the British army in the process. The coalition began to break up. Spain and Prussia made their peace with France in 1795, and after defeat in Northern Italy at the hands of the brilliant young French general Napoleon Bonaparte, the Austrians followed suit in 1797. The coalition collapsed, and the British stood alone against the French. Pitt had focused on taking the French possessions in the West Indies, but that theater turned out to be a sinkhole for the British army and navy, which together lost nearly forty thousand men, mostly to yellow fever.

Only the navy had much to show for its efforts. In naval warfare, the British retained their traditional advantage over the French. A century of war at sea gave the British an impressive backlog of experience in tactics and commanders. To be sure, the British navy remained a traditional aristocratic institution, with the officer ranks a preserve for oligarchy and the enlisted men a mistreated and brutalized segment of the laboring population. Yet naval operations required much knowledge and skill of its officers. The necessity of promoting according to merit had asserted itself and made the

Royal Navy into a highly professional service. French revolutionary enthusiasm, so effective in the army, could not make up for the loss of professional skill that resulted from the purging of aristocrats from the French navy.

The British navy never lost a major engagement during the twenty-five years of the war, and the French suffered about ten times as many casualties as the British in naval battles. Throughout the war, the British navy showed enthusiasm and aggressiveness in battles and flexibility and opportunism in tactics. In the years from 1793 to 1797, the navy collected French colonies in the West Indies; a fleet under Admiral Richard Howe defeated the French off Brest (The Glorious First of June, 1794); and Admirals John Jervis and Horatio Nelson destroyed a large Spanish flotilla at Cape St. Vincent (and thus prevented them from joining the French). By 1797, then, the war was a standoff: French victories on land and British victories at sea. The British navy alone stood between Britain and the French army that was making preparations for invasion.

THE WAR AT HOME

Meanwhile, the war at home was intensifying. British trade with France collapsed, and French privateers had some success in preying on British commercial shipping. An economic recession was the result. This was followed by a poor harvest in 1794, which caused serious food shortages, high prices, and food riots. Such economic disruptions were to occur sporadically throughout the war. Combined with high taxes and unpopular recruiting practices by the army and navy, economic troubles contributed to the growth of radicalism among the laboring ranks.

The extent of popular radicalism in the 1790s is very difficult to determine, for the evidence is shadowy at best. Clearly the radical movement was significant and was regarded as dangerous by the government. The LCS had perhaps five thousand members by 1795, and radical societies in other big cities sometimes enrolled half that many. They could rally very large crowds: the LCS, for instance, gathered at least one hundred thousand in central London on several occasions. These societies corresponded with each other and with the French Jacobins (the most militant revolutionaries), and the government heard rumors of nocturnal drillings on Yorkshire moors. In Scotland, most of the Lowland boroughs produced radical societies, and in 1792–93, delegates from eighty of them met in a convention in Edinburgh. The Scottish Convention and the massive demonstrations in London were the boldest radical activities of the early 1790s. On the whole, the radicals

before 1797 stuck to petitioning and persuasion. Certainly they failed to mobilize the mass of the laboring poor; hence, they remained a minority of the population.

In the eyes of the government, however, the radical movement was a grave threat. Beginning in 1793, Pitt's government undertook to suppress the radicals by authoritarian, if legal, action. In Scotland, two radicals—a lawyer and a Unitarian preacher—were convicted and sentenced to transportation to Botany Bay in Australia for spreading *The Rights of Man* and an address from the United Irishmen. When the Scottish Convention reconvened in November and December of 1793, the authorities broke it up, arrested the leaders, and sentenced three more of them to transportation. In England, the government adopted an extensive system of spies and paid informants. With secret (and shaky) evidence, Pitt secured from Parliament suspension of habeas corpus in 1794. Shortly after, the government arrested twelve London reformers, including Hardy and Horne Tooke, and tried them for treason. Although the jury refused to convict them, the effect of this pressure on the radical societies was great. Many respectable reformers such as Hardy and Horne Tooke withdrew from politics. Then in 1795, following one of the largest demonstrations in London, Pitt got Parliament to pass the Two Acts, which prohibited meetings of more than fifty people and made speaking or writing against the Crown and constitution treasonable.

This repression occurred within the context of a very strong conservative reaction. Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was the first but far from the last work of conservative propaganda. Conservative writings such as *The Anti-Jacobin*, edited by George Canning, and the *Cheap Repository Tracts*, published by Hannah More, emphasized to rich and poor alike that British liberty depended on maintaining the existing constitution, the "natural" social hierarchy, and the rights of private property. They played very effectively on the nationalist sentiment that had developed during the century of war against France by portraying revolutionary ideas as corrosive of good old English forthrightness and purity. The government, too, deliberately concocted rituals celebrating loyalty to the Crown. The ideology of the inseparability of church and state was revived, and the Church and King mobs rioted against reformers such as Joseph Priestley, a Unitarian minister and chemist whose laboratory was sacked in 1791. In 1792, men of property founded the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers, with hundreds of branches in both rural and urban areas. A volunteer force drawn from the gentry and yeomanry was established in 1794; it enlisted over four hundred thousand men by 1804.

The upshot of this potent movement was to identify conservatism with nationalism and reform with disloyalty and to provide the emotional background for the formation of a new Tory party made up of Pittites and conservative Whigs.

THE CRISIS OF 1797–1798

The repression of the years 1793–97 did not kill the radical movement, but drove it underground. Because many of the more cautious reformers dropped out, leadership of the movement fell into the hands of extremists, some of whom had revolutionary intentions. The LCS, for example, now turned into a revolutionary conspiracy. Such revolutionary organizations established close connections with the United Irishmen, who by 1796–97 were actively plotting to set up an independent republic in Ireland with French help. Agents of the United Irishmen formed United Irish societies among the Irish Catholic immigrants in London, Lancashire, and southwestern Scotland. More ominously, societies of United Englishmen and United Scotsmen were formed. They intended to establish independent republics in England and Scotland as well as in Ireland. The British state itself was to be dismembered.

How serious was the revolutionary movement? Again, the evidence is spotty and often tainted by official paranoia. Probably not every member of the widespread but small revolutionary cells was committed to violence. But the government received reports of drilling and arming among by people in a number of districts. And there is no question that some United Irish agents and English radicals did try to coordinate a revolutionary outbreak. Clearly, the conspirators could not have succeeded by themselves, but with French intervention and a simultaneous mass peasant revolt in Ireland, they might well have brought an end to the British oligarchy in 1798.

The French certainly hoped to invade and were prevented from doing so only by the British navy. In 1797, Napoleon was appointed commander in chief of France's army and began assembling a massive invasion force. Worse, in April 1797 the British Channel fleet at Spithead mutinied, and the North Sea fleet at the Nore followed suit in May. This was the most perilous moment in the history of Great Britain between 1707 and 1940. Undoubtedly, the low pay and miserable conditions of life at sea lay behind the mutinies, but radical ideology also contributed: over 10 percent of the sailors were Irish, many of them former Defenders or United Irishmen, and



The Death of Nelson by Benjamin West (1806). West exhibited this painting at his studio to admiring crowds not many months after the Battle of Trafalgar. West took some liberties with the facts: after he fell wounded, Nelson was carried below decks, where he died.

the LCS spread radical literature among the men. Rapid liberal concessions to the mutineers, however, settled the Spithead mutiny. In contrast, the Nore mutineers were put down by force; twenty-eight of the leaders were hanged and nearly a hundred were flogged. By October 1797, the French had missed their great chance. In that month, the Nore fleet was able to smash the Dutch navy at Camperdown. Napoleon gave up his plans to invade and turned to the conquest of Egypt instead. His army was cut off there by Nelson's crushing victory over a French fleet in the Battle of the Nile (Aboukir Bay) in 1798.

The timing of those events was extremely unlucky for the revolutionaries in Britain and Ireland because it deprived the United Irishmen of French assistance just as they rebelled. The United Irishmen had busily prepared for revolution throughout 1796. Irishman Wolfe Tone went to Paris to seek French assistance. In December 1797, a large French invasion force under General Lazare Hoche and accompanied by Wolfe Tone actually appeared in

Bantry Bay in southwestern Ireland. As usual, the weather was Protestant, and the force had to turn back; it was a near miss, however, and the United Irish continued to badger the French for help. Thousands of Irish peasants were mobilized and armed with pikes by the revolutionaries. All through 1797–98, the British executive in Ireland struggled to break up the rebellion before it started. The British general, Lake, relying on the ill-disciplined Irish militia and yeomanry, set out to disarm the populace by brute force. In their search for weapons, Lake's troops burned cottages and arrested, flogged, and tortured thousands of Catholics. Hideous wooden triangles on which men were tied for flogging blemished the landscape. Then, having penetrated the United Irish organization, the government arrested many of its leaders in March 1798. The remaining conspirators in desperation decided to go ahead with the rebellion even without French help. It began in May 1798.

The rebellion was supposed to break out simultaneously all over Ireland, but the only significant outbursts occurred in Wexford and Ulster. Small numbers and lack of coordination condemned the rebels to defeat. In Wexford, the insurrectionaries were almost exclusively Catholic. Badly armed and trained, the largely peasant forces attacked Protestants indiscriminately, taking revenge for centuries of oppression. The Wexford rebellion was beaten and the Protestant retribution was begun before the Ulster rebellion broke out in June. In Ulster, the rebels were mainly of Protestant origin and reflected the nonsectarian ideals of the French Revolution. They, too, were defeated by the end of June.

Only in August did French assistance arrive—too little, too late. The French had dithered and dissembled because they never trusted the United Irishmen's estimates of popular support. Thus, the French force that landed in Mayo in August 1798 amounted to only one thousand men. They fought gallantly for a month and then surrendered, while the small band of United Irish enthusiasts and illiterate Catholic peasants who had joined them was cut to pieces by British troops (including Scottish and Welsh regiments). Shortly after, the British navy intercepted a somewhat larger French expedition and captured it—among the captured troops was Wolfe Tone, who was tried and convicted of treason. He cheated the hangman by committing suicide with a razor.

The reprisals taken by British troops, especially by the Irish militia and yeomanry, were savage. But the British government, including Pitt and his lord lieutenant in Ireland, Lord Cornwallis, hoped to prevent further rebel-



The Rising of 1798 in Ireland. Irish nationalists hoped that the entire island would erupt in rebellion, but the Rising of 1798 was largely confined to eastern Leinster.



Cartoon of the Irish Rebellion of 1798. The original caption read, "Irish Rebellion of 1798: Rebels execute their Protestant prisoners at Wexford, June 20, 1798. The rebel flag's MWS stands for 'Murder Without Sin.'" Copper engraving by George George.

lion by more humane means—union between the British and Irish Parliaments plus Catholic emancipation (that is, allowing Catholics the same political rights as Protestants).

Unfortunately, George III opposed emancipation: "Mr. Pitt," he wrote, "has in my opinion saved Ireland, and now the new Lord Lieutenant must not lose the present moment of terror for frightening the supporters of the Castle into a Union with this country; and no further indulgences must be granted to the Roman Catholics." Pitt was not the man to press the king on a matter he felt strongly about, especially because in 1788 George III already had suffered one bout of debilitating illness from porphyria (thought at the time to be insanity). Thus, the bill of union that was presented to both the British and the Irish Parliaments included no measure of Catholic emancipation. The bill passed easily in Britain, but met strong opposition in Ireland, especially among Protestant Patriots who did not want to give up what they had won in 1782. In addition, many nervous Protestants believed that their religion would be more secure from Catholicism under the protection of their own legislators. Gradually, however, some members of the ruling elite became persuaded that their best defense in the long run lay in close connection with the British, and the government meanwhile used all the

tools of eighteenth-century corruption to get its way. After furious debate in Ireland, the Irish Parliament in Dublin passed the Act of Union in 1800—and so abolished itself. Irish voters would not elect one hundred members to the British Parliament at Westminster. Pitt resigned in 1801 because of his failure to carry Catholic emancipation, but he did not press the issue further. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland thus came into being; it was to last until 1921, an unhappy and only partly consummated union that was, however, essential to resolve the crisis of 1797–98.

WAR, 1798–1815

After 1798, the war became a long and drawn out slogging match. Pitt (who died in 1806) and his successors relied on the British navy to stave off a French invasion of the British Isles and to apply economic pressure on France, but not until 1813 could Britain and the allies defeat Napoleon on land. The war went through five main phases:

1. 1798–1802, when Britain organized a second coalition against France, only to see it hammered to pieces by Napoleon;
2. 1802–03, when by the Peace of Amiens the British and French agreed to a truce in the fighting;
3. 1803–12, when Napoleon won unparalleled domination over Europe, defeating a third coalition of aristocratic states but losing at the Battle of Trafalgar (1805) his last chance to invade Britain and then suffocating from a British naval blockade;
4. 1812–13, when Napoleon invaded Russia but was forced to retreat and then suffered a devastating defeat at the hands of the fourth coalition—the first alliance to involve all four anti-French powers: Britain (the organizer and paymaster), Prussia, Austria, and Russia; and
5. 1815, when Napoleon, having escaped from exile in Elba, rallied his army, only to be defeated once and for all at Waterloo.

During the entire period from 1798 to 1815, the British government sustained the war effort by tapping the tremendous economic resources of the nation. Here Pitt's administrative reforms of the 1780s and his wartime financial prowess proved decisive. The increasingly dynamic British economy—whether in cotton textiles, iron, coal mining, or agriculture—suffered repeated temporary dislocations, but each time it bounded back. Pitt used both borrowing and taxation to tap into this economic power. Annual

governmental war loans tripled between 1794 and 1797; as the national debt soared, the annual interest charge alone rose to £30 million—more than the entire national budget of 1792! Recognizing the impossibility of financing the war wholly from loans, Pitt turned to heavy tax increases. Eventually, taxes covered about one-half of war expenditures. Customs and excises remained the principal source, but Pitt also invented the income tax in 1799. Although this tax was extremely unpopular, industrialists as well as landowners paid it. In this way, the propertied classes showed their willingness to support the oligarchical state against revolution and French domination.

Napoleon eventually recognized that, if he were to win, he had to weaken the British economy; consequently, by his Continental System (1806), he sought to exclude British trade from Europe. But this was a game two could play: the British in 1807 responded with their *Orders in Council*, which blockaded French ports and allowed neutrals to trade with France only if they first shipped their goods through Britain. This was Europe's first major economic war, a kind of struggle for which the British were very much better equipped than the French. Napoleon was unable to stop up all the spigots through which Europeans sought to quench their thirst for British and colonial goods—manufactured articles, textiles, tobacco, tea, sugar, and so on—and his attempt to do so alienated people throughout the Continent. British merchants and manufacturers became extremely unhappy with the Orders in Council, which disrupted their trade, but the French failure to cut off all trade to the Continent for any sustained period gave outlets to their pressure. When the British government (then led by Lord Liverpool) revoked the Orders in Council in 1812, Napoleon was only too glad to abandon the Continental System. “Undoubtedly,” he wrote, “it is necessary to harm our foes, but above all we must live.”

Napoleon invaded Portugal in 1807 to close off one of the biggest leaks in the Continental System. The British sent an expeditionary force under Arthur Wellesley (later the duke of Wellington) to stop the French in Portugal and to assist the Spanish who were rebelling against French rule. The consequent Peninsular War never absorbed more than 40,000 British troops, but it tied down 250,000 Frenchmen. Eventually, Wellington was able to go on the offensive and in 1813 to cross the Pyrenees into France.

The economic war also led Napoleon into the decisive and disastrous invasion of Russia in 1812. By then, Napoleon needed to coerce the Russians into cooperating with his exclusion of British trade. His gigantic army was successful at first, but after taking Moscow it had to withdraw in bitter cold

and privation through land destroyed by the Russians themselves. The fourth coalition, again organized and paid for by the British and now including all four anti-French powers, defeated Napoleon and sent its army into Paris in 1814. The French emperor abdicated and retired to Elba.

Meanwhile, the Orders in Council caused war between Britain and the United States (1812–14). This conflict was a diversion that the British wanted to avoid, but their insistence on stopping and searching American ships for British seamen aggravated American touchiness about freedom of the seas. The French could give the Americans no assistance this time, but the British were unable to deploy enough manpower to defeat and occupy the United States. British troops burned Washington, DC, but by 1814, the war was a stalemate and both powers were ready for peace. The only outcome from the British point of view was the lesson that, to protect Canada in the future, the British must maintain good relations with the United States.

The final act of the great war between Britain and France was played in the summer of 1815. Napoleon slipped away from Elba, rallied the French army once more, and reclaimed power in France. The allied powers dispatched a huge army under the duke of Wellington to defeat him. The two forces crashed together at Waterloo, near Brussels in Belgium. The battle was, as Wellington said, “the nearest run thing that you ever saw in your life,” but the combined British and Prussian armies won the day. Napoleon abdicated again and spent the remainder of his days in exile on the tiny British island of St. Helena.

Now we are ready to understand why the British went to war in 1793 and how the oligarchy was able to survive. Pitt and his successors were principally concerned about protecting British interests on the Continent, interests defined as the need to export goods to Europe and to prevent any one power from dominating all the others. Only toward the end did the British government insist on the expulsion of Napoleon, and that was simply because they regarded him as insatiably aggressive. In this way, the British government reflected the concerns of its modern as well as traditional propertied elements.

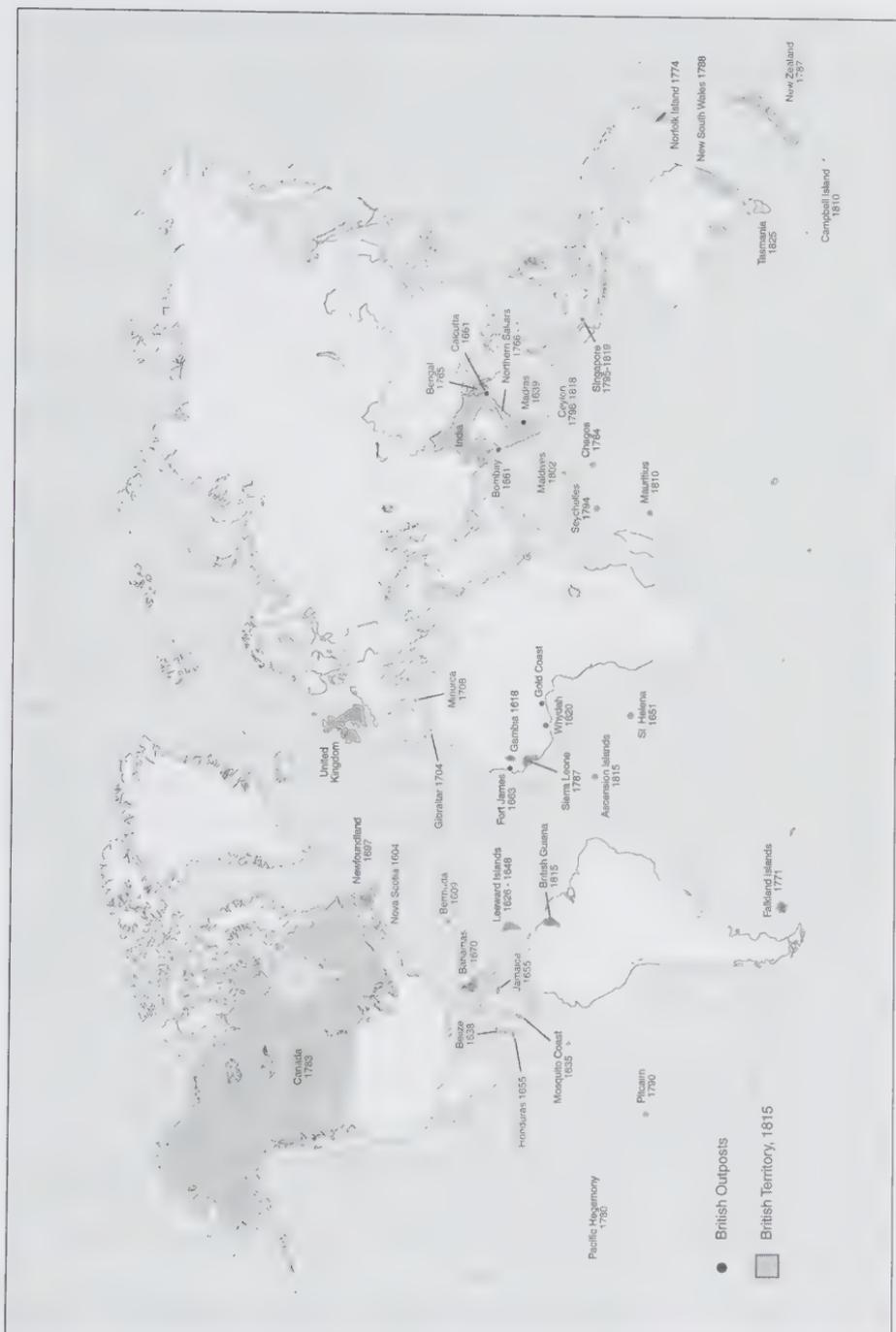
The regime was able to survive the stress for several reasons. First, Pitt had restored the effectiveness of the government between 1783 and 1793; indeed, he unwittingly had taken important steps toward creating a modern state. Second, he and his successors were able to use parliamentary taxing authority to harness the burgeoning British economy. Third, the British navy kept the French from invading the British Isles in force.

Fourth, resolute repressive action by the government—plus a large measure of luck—kept the French, the Irish, and the British revolutionaries from coordinating their efforts. Finally, in the ideological struggle at home, conservative nationalism proved to be marginally stronger than reformism and revolution.

THE PRIZES AND COSTS OF WAR, 1793–1815

It is important to remember that mere survival of the state and security of limited interests on the Continent were all that Britain had fought for; otherwise, one would not think they gained much for their efforts. In the negotiations at Vienna that produced the postwar settlement, the British sought no territory in Europe and not a great deal elsewhere. They kept a few colonial prizes that turned out to be valuable later: Malta in the Mediterranean; Guiana, Tobago, and St. Lucia in the West Indies; the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa; and Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. But the British negotiator, Viscount Castlereagh, was a supreme realist and did obtain what Britain wanted most: security of British interests in Europe. France was not broken up, but its borders were reduced to pre-1792 lines, and the Bourbon monarchy was restored. The Dutch Republic and the Austrian Netherlands were merged into a stronger state, the United Netherlands, and given British cash to fortify against French intrusion. Further, Castlereagh obtained a balance of power: Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia signed an alliance against a recurrence of French might, and Prussia and Austria were made strong enough to block a Russian advance into Central Europe. Finally, Castlereagh persuaded all the powers to meet periodically to settle disputes by discussion.

For these benefits the British had paid dearly. The war had not been distinguished by technological innovations in weaponry; nevertheless, British manpower losses were bad enough—upward of 210,000 died in combat or from disease, or one in every eighty-five people in the British Isles, a more severe loss proportionately than in World War II. Further, the war cost the British about £1.5 billion in direct expenditures, plus untold sums in economic gains forgone because of the diversion of resources into war making. But here one has to be careful about cost accounting. First, the propertied few suffered much less than the unpropertied many from the economic burden because the massive loans floated by the government took the form of bonds purchased by the rich. These were redeemed after the war through taxation, and now once again in the form of customs and excises, which put



The British Empire in 1815. At the end of its wars with revolutionary and Napoleonic France, the British Empire did not look substantially larger than it had a century earlier (see map, p. 52). But Britain's foothold in South Africa would prove to be enormously important over the next century.

a disproportionate weight on the poor. Second, British economic growth continued during the war, though it was not as great as it would have been if Europe had remained at peace. Because the French economy suffered more than did the British, Britain emerged in 1815 very much farther ahead of its closest economic rival than it had been in 1793.

Great wars almost inevitably alter the societies of the participating states, including those of the victors. This was true of British society during the war from 1793 to 1815, even though the regime went to war in part to defend itself from revolutionary social change. It is safe to say that the British ruling elite—the landowners—came out of the war stronger and more secure than any other European aristocracy. This fact would have a great impact on nineteenth-century Britain. Not only did no successful revolution occur in Britain, but also land values and rentals increased.

The British landed orders felt sufficiently threatened by domestic agitation and external revolution that they thrust off many of their remaining traditional paternalist obligations. Most notably, they passed the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800, prohibiting workers from negotiating collectively to regulate wages; they repealed in 1813–14 the old Tudor legislation regulating wages and entry into crafts; and in 1815 they passed the Corn Law, a duty on the importation of grain to keep prices high on the wheat grown in England. This *abdication of paternalism* was likely to have happened, war or no war, for as we have seen, it was well underway in the general transition from custom to contract. The resentment and anxiety the oligarchy felt in the face of popular radicalism during the war simply accelerated the process. In any case, the landowners' abdication of paternalism—and simultaneous insistence on political repression and social discipline—contributed powerfully to a great transformation of the social structure, from social hierarchy to social classes.

By 1815, Britain was well on the way to being a *class society*, that is, a society organized into three large, self-conscious, and hostile *layers* of people. Each of these horizontal groupings—the landed class, the middle class, and the working class—was becoming aware that its members shared interests and experiences that were different from the interests and experiences of the other classes.

The process of class formation was a matter of *consciousness*. Under pressure from below, the British landed oligarchy between 1793 and 1815 became conscious of the need to stand shoulder to shoulder and protect their power. The commercial and industrial ranks likewise experienced a

growing consciousness of their own special interests. They regarded themselves as the people responsible for the commercial and industrial expansion of the nation; hence, they considered themselves to be the source of Britain's power and progress. Yet they felt they were denied social and political power equal to their economic accomplishments. Nonconformists, especially, felt aggrieved by their exclusion from Parliament and municipal office. People of the middling ranks continued during the war years to agitate for parliamentary reform and then objected when the government's suppression of radicalism fell on them as well as laborers. They complained loudly when the Orders in Council and the new Corn Law infringed their interests. Thus, in the course of organizing to promote their interests, the British middle class came on the stage of history—self-confident, aggressive, blunt, and feeling aggrieved.

It took laboring people much longer than the landed orders and the middle class to develop and disseminate widely a consciousness of themselves as a class. In some ways the process was not complete until the late nineteenth century, for obstacles such as illiteracy, poverty, and social dependency were too strong to be overcome easily. How far the working class was formed by 1815 and how much the experience of the war had to do with it are not easy to determine. Radicalism spread fairly widely through the British artisan ranks, but it remained a minority movement. Most of the laboring poor seem to have been loyalist and conservative, or simply ignorant and apathetic, rather than radical or revolutionary. Clearly, the massive social changes of the Triple Revolution had more to do with working-class formation than did democratic parties during the war with France. Nevertheless, the foundations, at least, of the British working-class consciousness were laid by 1815, and radicalism and repression played a part in the shared experience underlying class consciousness. Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*, for instance, became one of the most widely read books in working-class homes.

In the years between 1805 and 1815, artisanal radicalism slowly revived, and popular patriotism began to merge with the movement. The key figure here was William Cobbett, a farmer's son, journalist, and consummate political polemicist. Cobbett was an instinctive Tory, full of nostalgia for traditional rural England, and he criticized the government at first only for its ineffectiveness against the French. But in 1804–06, his criticism of government inefficiency made him the victim of official prosecution; afterward, he became for many years the leading radical critical of corruption, patronage, the overmighty oligarchy, and the unreformed Parliament.

Critics such as Cobbett by 1815 were helping the laboring people understand the relations between the abdication of paternalism, the corrupt self-interest of the landowners and London financiers, the abuse of civil rights, and the need for parliamentary reform. This line of thinking proved to be the main connection between the French Revolution and the emerging working-class consciousness in Britain.

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Chapter 12

Intellectual and Spiritual Revolutions, 1780–1815

The period from the 1780s to 1815 was one of revolutions in thought as well as in society and politics. Indeed, social and political change during these years of crisis set in motion major transformations in the ways that the British people understood themselves, their society, and their place in the universe. Not all of the lines of change went in the same direction, for the society was too complex to call forth only a single set of intellectual and spiritual responses. Thus, there emerged in this period two directly opposed strands of thought: one—broadly speaking, the utilitarian—characterized by extreme rationalism and cold calculation, and the other—the evangelical and romantic—marked by heightened emotions and otherworldliness. The tension between the two contributed as much as did social and political revolutions to the unique drama of the period. Both strands, however, were alike in that they broke with essential aspects of Augustan ideas and beliefs.

UTILITARIANISM

The utilitarian strand of thought seems in some ways not to break with the main lines of eighteenth-century ideas but to extend them. As we saw in chapter 5, a form of utilitarianism was a common philosophy of early eighteenth-century moralists. The utilitarianism of the last decades of the century stood firmly in the British empiricist tradition. Yet the leading utilitarian of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Jeremy Bentham, extended these earlier lines of thought so radically as to produce something entirely new: not a cheerful philosophy for the landed gentry, but a clanking ideology for the new industrial captains.

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) was one of the most influential British thinkers of the modern era, but a distinctly odd character. Like Adam Smith, whose economic ideas he came to adopt, Bentham was a simple and

unworldly man, an empiricist with little actual experience of the world. His father, a Tory lawyer, was very anxious to climb the ladder of London society. But Jeremy, a weak, shy, painfully awkward youth, found success only in his studies. He became a man of books, almost totally intellectualized. He read Latin and Greek at age six, entered Oxford at thirteen, and took his MA at eighteen. Though he studied law, he was not fit for the rough and tumble of practice at the bar. He turned instead to the philosophical criticism of English law and from that to moral and social philosophy in general.

Bentham thought of himself as doing for moral philosophy what Newton had done for physics—reducing all data to one or a few principles. To him the greatest principle was utility. In general, utilitarianism is an ethical philosophy that judges behavior or social action according to its consequences. Bentham was a *hedonistic* utilitarian—that is, he believed any act is good or bad depending on whether it promotes happiness (or pleasure). To him, this principle was based on the very essence of human nature: that each person behaves so as to pursue pleasure and avoid pain. Unlike earlier utilitarians, Bentham separated this hedonistic principle from any concept of a divine plan and set it squarely in a materialistic philosophy. The divine played no part in the Benthamite universe, nor did elevated ideas of beauty and truth. Bentham had no sensitivity to beauty in art or poetry, and he carried empiricism to the extreme. He disparaged words such as *society*, *beauty*, *good*, or *social contract* as simply abstractions because they stood for no real objects in the world. Use of such words, Bentham believed, leads people to think that abstract objects do exist and thus to make mistakes in moral and legal philosophy. All we can know comes through the senses. Complex ideas of the imagination are nothing but the mechanical manipulation and combination of sensory experience. Indeed, human beings are little more than calculating machines that register sensations and sum up pleasures and pains.

Bentham's first book, published in 1776, was an attack on the orthodox legal thought of the day, best expressed by Sir William Blackstone, the century's most eminent legal philosopher. Blackstone believed that the existing system of English law was natural and reasonable, its basis being the idea of social contract. Bentham, however, regarded the law as an irrational tangle of historical precedent and accident, and dismissed the social contract as a fiction, a metaphysical mistake. What was needed, he insisted, was a radical simplification and codification of the laws according to the principle of utility. A law (past, present, or future) ought to be judged as to whether it increases or decreases the happiness of the society. Because society, Bentham said, is nothing but the aggregate of individuals who make it up,

the happiness of all is just a matter of calculating the total of individual pleasures and pains.

Bentham laid out his system in exhaustive (and exhausting) detail in his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, first published in 1789. The moral and legal thinking he advocated in it is remarkably mechanical and mathematical. Bentham even called his system of analyzing, measuring, and summing up pleasures and pains the *felicific calculus* (from the Latin *felicis* or happy). He made no qualitative distinctions between types of pleasures and pains: all are to be weighed according to the physical sensations they cause. “Prejudice apart,” he insisted, “the [child’s] game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry.” Consequently, he argued that no motive in itself is either good or bad, nor, in fact, do *goodness* and *badness* exist as such. All actions, by individuals or the state, are good or bad only according to their consequences—that is, whether on balance the action brings more pleasure or more pain. Lawmaking and governing are simply matters of weighing and counting.

Bentham argued that the purpose of every government is to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. This principle would seem to provide the basis for interventionist policies by the government, and indeed, some Benthamite civil servants and social scientists in the nineteenth century definitely favored interventionist social engineering. But Bentham himself adopted Adam Smith’s *laissez-faire* ideas, and so generally opposed state intervention in matters of economic policy. He regarded the self-regulating aspect of Smith’s free market economic model as simple and seemingly scientific. Further, he agreed with Smith that the individual knows best what is good for himself or herself. Because all laws essentially restrict human behavior, they inevitably cause pain; consequently, they should be minimized. Bentham’s utilitarian philosophy was, therefore, materialist, calculating, and individualistic.

It was not, however, necessarily democratic. In theory, every kind of government can pursue the greatest happiness of the greatest number. In his early years, Bentham was a Tory who opposed both the American and French Revolutions because of their talk of “natural rights”—to Bentham a clear case of philosophical fiction. After 1800, however, Bentham became a democrat—indeed, one of the leading theoreticians of radical parliamentary reform. He did so because he became disillusioned with the British oligarchy, which refused to accept particular schemes he proposed, notably an elaborate plan for prison reform. By 1810 he reasoned that the only way to make the interests of the rulers coincide with the interests of the ruled was



The mummified body of Jeremy Bentham now resides in University College, London.

to bring about a more democratic representative government. He and his disciples like James Mill thus combined the ideas of utilitarian legal codification and laissez-faire economics with parliamentary reform. By the time Bentham died in 1832, this package formed a potent program, the dominant political ideology of the new British middle class.

PARSON MALTHUS

There was yet another aspect of the utilitarian package—the population principle of the Reverend Thomas Malthus. This was an odd element in utilitarianism, for the ideas of Bentham and Smith were basically optimistic and progressive, whereas those of Malthus were pessimistic and even reactionary. Nevertheless, many early nineteenth-century Britons believed that these ideas fit together. Malthus (1766–1834) was the son of an Enlightened English country gentleman, a friend of Hume and Rousseau, and a believer in the power of reason to improve humankind. In the late 1790s, father and son (who was by then a clergyman in the Church of England) engaged in a profound argument about the fate of humanity. Malthus's father contended that progress was possible and likely. But Malthus himself argued a fundamentally pessimistic position based on his deep concern about the long-term effects of the population explosion. Malthus committed his views to paper in *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, first published in 1798.

Parson Malthus reasoned with great logical force that the population of any country tends to outstrip the food supply. His explanation was that the population tends to increase geometrically—that is, 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, and so on—whereas the food supply can increase only arithmetically—that is, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and so on. As any farmer knew, food production could be expanded only by adding increments of land to the already cultivated land—increments of less fertile soil, to boot. But the population would double itself in each generation until it was more or less brutally checked. Malthus thought that the only checks on population increase are natural (vice and misery) and prudential (delay of marriage). Hence, Malthus argued against the paternalism of the Poor Law, which, he said, only spreads poverty and hunger while encouraging the poor to have more children. The Poor Laws, he wrote, “tend to create the poor they maintain.”

Malthus was himself a humane and cheerful man. But his gloomy predictions, seemingly based on inexorable facts, appeared to make economics a dismal science. In fact, Malthus became England's first professional economist when he accepted a professorship of political economy at the East India College in 1805. Many utilitarians, who admired his mathematical reasoning and his sticking to hard facts, thought that Malthus was advising against any humanitarian social policy. Thus, his ideas strongly reinforced the laissez-faire weapons in the utilitarian arsenal. Moreover, he seemed to blame the poor for their own poverty, for it was their own imprudence that increased the number of mouths to feed. This, of course, was a comfortable doctrine for the wealthy, but was not exactly what Malthus meant. His own

view was that land reform and a shift of resources to agriculture were necessary to mitigate the harsh facts of life.

JOHN WESLEY AND THE EVANGELICAL REVIVAL

Parson Malthus's assumption that passion as well as reason determines human behavior forms a bridge to the second great stream of British thought in the age of revolutions. Both evangelicalism and romanticism were intensely emotional movements. The evangelical revival had an enormous impact on the tone and temper of British society. It raised the religious temperature of British Christianity at the same time that it chilled the bawdy and licentious behavior of preindustrial culture. Evangelicalism stood in vigorous opposition to conventional Augustan religion. Whereas eighteenth-century religion (both Anglican and Nonconformist) was dry, unemotional, and complacent, evangelicalism was emotional, highly moralistic, and intensely personal. Beginning in the 1730s, the evangelical spark glowed warmly until in the 1780s it burst into flames that swept through the British Isles. It spawned a dynamic new denomination, Methodism; transformed torpid Dissent into enthusiastic and aggressive Nonconformity; and reinvigorated a segment of the Church of England. By 1815, the evangelical revival had transformed the religious life of Britain.

The core of evangelicalism was Methodism, whose principal founder was John Wesley (1703–91), arguably the most important individual in British history between 1750 and 1850. His own quest for holiness set the pattern for Methodism and the wider evangelical revival that fanned out around it. Born in rural Lincolnshire to an Anglican clergyman and his strong-willed wife, John Wesley inherited from his ancestors the spark of Puritanism. He was the favorite son in a family of nineteen children, but because of his mother's domineering personality he had severe problems in feeling his own worth. At Oxford he shunned the drinking and wenching enjoyed by most other students, but his real turn to seriousness did not come until he was ordained shortly after graduation. As a young tutor and newly minted priest, Wesley joined a few undergraduates in forming a holy club devoted to regular study, prayer, fasting, and charitable work. The methodical activities of this little circle won for its members the derisive label of *Methodists* and became the model for later Methodist practice, but they did not bring Wesley the assurance of holiness he sought.

In the 1730s, Wesley's quest for holiness came to a crisis. He embarked on a missionary expedition to Georgia, hoping to convert the Indians and



John Wesley Preaching in Cornwall, by Frank Dadd. Here the founder of Methodism preaches one of his outdoor sermons to people of all social orders.

to learn religious truth himself in the process. Alas, the expedition was a disaster, and Wesley returned to London in 1738, more persuaded than ever of his own unworthiness. But during his service in Georgia he had met some Moravians (German pietists) who deeply impressed him with their simple, calm religiosity, even in the face of the terrifying Atlantic storms. They stressed personal salvation in their theology, and they pressed Wesley on the issue. For a time, Wesley could answer their questioning only by saying he knew Christ had died to save people in general. But in May of 1738, in the depths of depression, Wesley finally had a conversion experience and found relief from his agony of self-doubt. One evening at a religious meeting, he reported, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Wesley spent the rest of his long life carrying the message of personal salvation to everyone who would listen. He never took a parish, but became an itinerant preacher. He preached in churches, homes, village halls, and open fields to high and low, regardless of social rank. He is thought to have traveled some 250,000 miles on horseback and to have preached more than 40,000 sermons. He and his disciples, including his brother Charles and the spellbinding orator George Whitefield (1714–70), were amazingly effective. Conventional bishops and parish clergymen condemned them and hostile mobs attacked them, yet Wesley and his team of preachers touched thousands of souls neglected by the Church of England. Their intensely emotional words, and above all their hymns, moved crowds of people to conversion, sometimes causing men and women to gesture uncontrollably, to writhe on the floor, and to groan loudly as they parted company with evil. Moreover, Wesley left behind him in each locality small societies of the converted called *classes*, devoted to Bible reading, regular prayer, and mutual confession of sin. Enfolded within these tightly organized, mutually supportive groups, individuals were able to sustain their initial religious enthusiasm. By 1780, there were over 80,000 Wesleyan Methodists in Britain, and in 1815 almost 220,000.

These figures, however, show only part of Wesley's influence, for the great revival he inspired affected many thousands of people never organized into Methodist classes as it swept through Nonconformity (and as we will see below, through one wing, at least, of the Church of England). Like the established church, English Dissent in the first half of the eighteenth century had adopted a restrained and rational religiosity that bore few traces of the Puritan crusading spirit or emotional power. Wesley's message of *vital religion* injected Nonconformity (and Scottish Presbyterianism) with evangelical energy. This evangelical transformation helps account for the remarkable rise in the number of Nonconformist worshippers and in Nonconformist social and cultural influence in nineteenth-century England and Wales, as well as the vitality of Scottish Presbyterianism.

THE THEOLOGY AND APPEAL OF EVANGELICALISM

What was the theology of the evangelical revival? It was intensely personal and salvation oriented; it put relatively little emphasis on the church as an institution, but focused instead on the direct relationship between the individual and his or her God. Wesley and his followers began with a strong sense of original sin: the inherent degradation of human nature tends

always to pull the individual into sin and therefore to separate him or her from God. Hence, Wesley stressed that people are worms, corrupt, diseased, and enslaved. But God is merciful and sends grace to everyone to save all from the “law of sin and death.” In this regard, Wesley rejected the Calvinist doctrine of the elect. His message was that Christ died for *all* sinners. Whitefield and a number of other evangelicals split with Wesley on this point and formed the Calvinistic Methodist branch. But most evangelicals followed Wesley: saving grace is a gift to all, which an individual can do nothing to earn or deserve, but which he or she has the free will to accept or reject. Acceptance is made by an act of faith in personal salvation. Thus, the essence of evangelical theology was *salvation by grace through faith*.

Wesley, however, did not believe that a person could remain in that initial state of grace. By accepting grace, one is justified, or forgiven. But he or she would either move forward to *sanctification* (holiness) or backslide into sin. Wesley set great store by the journey of sanctification; consequently, Methodists emphasized the practice of good works such as prayer, reading the Scriptures, visiting the sick, and giving to charity. As a result, Methodists, and evangelicals in all the denominations, became known for their social action—and above all, as we will see, for their efforts to abolish slavery. Good works, Wesley said, are necessary for holiness. At the last day, each person will stand before the divine throne and receive judgment on the balance of good and evil done in his or her whole life. Everything we have is a gift from God; therefore, we are bound to use it well. Wesley urged his followers to give to the poor not a tenth or a half, “no, not three fourths, but all!”

Evangelical theology led believers to philanthropy, but it also tended to make them repressed personalities. Evangelicals spoke of joyful liberation, but often were humorless and censorious toward themselves and others. They regarded life as a struggle toward the final eternal accounting, inevitably a matter of gravity and earnestness. The stakes, after all, were paradise or hellfire. Every little act counted. God had given each person talents and abilities—and in many cases, property that it was sinful to waste. The stewardship of God’s gifts required people to avoid frivolous behavior and to discourage it in others. As the *Methodist Magazine* said in 1807, “If dancing be a waste of time . . . if it be a species of trifling ill suited to a creature on trial for eternity . . . then is dancing a practice utterly opposed to the whole spirit and temper of Christianity.” If dancing was wrong, still more so were many of the pastimes in traditional popular culture: gambling, drinking, brawling, cock fighting, bull baiting, and all the rest. Methodism proved to be a primary weapon in the destruction of the preindustrial popular way of life.

Serious and grave though it was, evangelicalism appealed to people at all levels of the social spectrum except the very highest and lowest. It had little effect on the aristocracy until the nineteenth century, and it failed to draw in the dregs of society. But in between, from the gentry down through the middling sorts to the shopkeepers, artisans, and industrial workers, Methodism and its evangelical offshoots made converts. Not all the gentry responded favorably to Methodism, for it plainly aimed to put a damper on their hard-drinking, hard-riding self-indulgence. Many of the ordinary clergymen of the Church of England took their cue from the *squirearchy* in resisting Methodism; moreover, they believed that Wesleyan preachers violated decorum and church discipline. In some parishes, squire and parson joined to condemn Methodists as Jacobites, Jacobins, or revolutionaries and to rouse the village roughs against them. One Wesleyan itinerant preacher was stoned to death, and many of the others, including Wesley himself, had to flee from crowds intent on bodily harm. But others among the gentry came to think of Methodism as a bulwark to the social order. They believed rightly that it taught paternalism to the upper ranks on the one hand and orderliness and deference to the laboring poor on the other. Members of the oligarchy found it especially attractive during the French Revolution. They believed that the terrors of the French Revolution were a divine punishment for atheism and infidelity. As one clergyman recalled in 1817: "England was alarmed by the judgements, of which . . . she was a close spectatress, and panted for an opportunity to take the lead in restoring man to his allegiance to his Heavenly Sovereign."

People in the middling ranks responded to the message of evangelical revival almost en masse. Whether they became Methodists or participated in the emotional renovation of one of the old Dissenting denominations, they took to evangelicalism enthusiastically. They found it expressed values of duty, work, and thrift so important to their lives as directors of commerce and industry. Wesley noticed that Methodism was helpful to people in the market economy and that Methodists often became successful and complacent. He warned his listeners to remember that the purpose of a Christian's labor is "to please God; to do, not his own will, but the will of Him that sent him into the world." Nevertheless, the economic usefulness of evangelicalism was too strong for people in the competitive world of trade to resist. Moreover, industrial entrepreneurs recognized that evangelicalism helped tame the preindustrial laboring poor and turn them into a regular, orderly industrial work force. Evangelicalism, then, served as a weapon for the early industrialists, but one that worked *on* them as well as *for* them.

The attractions of Methodism for the laboring poor were more complex. The social and political message of Methodism plainly was conservative and quietist. Wesley remained a Tory all his life, and he told his listeners among the common people to remember their places in the social hierarchy and to bear their sufferings in this world by concentrating on their rewards in the next. Why then did so many respond favorably? First, the Wesleyans actively reached out to them and offered spiritual solace in a time when life was hard and short and when customary conditions were breaking down. Second, Methodism, through its chapels, love feasts (quarterly dinners with prayers and singing), and classes, offered working people opportunities for community. This was vital because the course of economic and social change was rapidly eroding traditional supports of communal life. Third, whatever Wesley's hierarchical and conservative views, Methodism carried a message of equality and independence. There were even female preachers in early Methodism, something not acceptable in the Church of England.

Wesleyan preachers defied the wishes of the Anglican elite by preaching to all the people, even outside the parochial system. They gave ordinary people—miners, artisans, blacksmiths, and shopkeepers—a chance to express some independence by participating in revival meetings. Methodism also offered the laboring poor some means of maintaining their independence by teaching them to read in Sunday schools and by inculcating in them sober and industrious habits. Above all, Methodism taught that all people are equal before God; salvation is equally available to all, not just to the rich. By this message of equality and independence, Methodism was eventually to spawn generations of working-class leaders.

This spirit of equality and independence meant that popular Methodism was subject to repeated splintering. Wesley always regarded himself as a clergyman of the Anglican church, but in 1784, he was forced to begin ordaining priests in order to supply the revival in North America with clergymen. By this step, he took on the rights of a bishop and in effect separated himself and the Methodists from the Church of England. After his death, some groups of working-class Methodists broke away from his organization. In 1797, one Alexander Kilham led a number of northern working men and women out of the Methodist connection because of the orthodox Wesleyan opposition to radicalism.

In 1811, two artisan lay preachers founded yet another sect—the Primitive Methodists—because the Wesleyans turned against the revivalist camp meetings that were popular with working people. In the crises of the 1790s, still other laborers turned to various strange forms of millenarian

Christianity, such as that led by the mystic Joanna Southcott, a domestic servant from Devon who thought she would give birth to Shiloh, the new divine ruler of the earth. One way or another, all such sectaries hoped for the establishment in England of a New Jerusalem—a new society of purity and justice.

Some historians have argued that Methodism prevented revolution in England. The French liberal Elie Halévy, for instance, said in the early 1900s that social quietism spread by the Methodists was what kept the English from following the French example. To what extent is this Halévy thesis true? As we saw in chapter 11, revolutionary efforts in Britain failed for a number of different reasons, among them the determination and power of the oligarchy, the strength of the state, the ability of Parliament to tap Britain's burgeoning wealth, and the antirevolutionary influence of nationalist sentiment. Yet it seems certain that because Methodism—or, more accurately, the evangelical revival in general—taught people to be patient with their lot in life and to expect their rewards in another world, it did help defuse the revolutionary bomb in Britain. In the long run, Methodism helped the British working people to organize and lead themselves; in the short run, it channeled the enormous energy of popular discontent into safe outlets.

METHODISM IN WALES

The Methodist revival was even more important to Wales than to England. Wesley visited Wales forty-six times, but because of what he called “the heavy curse of the confusion of tongues,” native Welsh-speaking revivalists played a greater role than he in converting Wales. The Welsh revivalists began their crusade independent of Wesley. Their efforts were closely associated with the educational work of Griffith Jones. From the 1730s, Jones established a system of schools taught by itinerant masters, who made many thousands of ordinary Welsh children literate in Welsh. At about the same time, revivalism caught fire in southern Wales. The key figures were Howell Harris, a layman of prodigious energy and ego; Daniel Rowland, an Anglican preacher of hypnotic power; and William Williams (known as “Pantycelyn”), another Anglican priest, whose hymns became a vital part of Welsh culture. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, Thomas Charles led the expansion of Methodism into northern Wales.

Methodism grew rapidly in Wales between 1750 and 1775, and then from the 1780s its evangelical energy reinvigorated the old dissenting sects:

Baptists, Independents, and Presbyterians. The Welsh Methodists cooperated with Wesley, but they preferred Calvinist theology and so sided with Whitefield. Eventually, in 1811, the Welsh Methodists broke with the established church to form a new Welsh sect, Calvinistic Methodism. By then, the Calvinistic Methodists and other Dissenters amounted to almost 20 percent of the Welsh population, and Dissent continued to grow rapidly. In 1851, Dissenters outnumbered Anglicans in Wales by 5 to 1.

The new and old Dissenting denominations took the place of the fading Celtic bardic tradition to form the heart and soul of Welsh popular culture. Even before the evangelical revival, there had been a sharp divide between the increasingly anglicized gentry and their Welsh-speaking tenants and laborers. Because the evangelical revival was carried out in Welsh, it added a religious dimension to the great divide: now the gentry were Anglican and English-speaking, and the people were Dissenters and Welsh-speaking. When the Industrial Revolution took hold in South Wales (see chapter 10), it concentrated there a large number of Welsh-speaking Dissenters. There, the church-versus-chapel social division coincided with conflict between upper class and working class.

THE EVANGELICALS IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

The fires of evangelicalism also burned within the Church of England, where the men and women who were inspired by Wesley's message of vital religion were called the Evangelicals or Saints. These believers, largely from the higher social classes, saw evangelical theology as a means of combating lower class radicalism; above all, however, they wanted to abandon merely nominal Christianity and to make religion count in every way in their lives. They remained a numerical minority in the Anglican church, but their enthusiasm and their relentless determination to renovate society and reinvigorate the church gave them influence out of proportion to their numbers. From the 1780s on, the Evangelical insistence on a personal and emotional faith (as opposed to subtle dogma, ecclesiastical privileges, or latitudinarian complacency) made for a formidable Low Church position.

The most famous of the early Evangelicals was a small group of wealthy and well-connected philanthropic activists called the Clapham Sect—so named because they lived in the village of Clapham just south of London. The Clapham Sect included Henry Thornton, a banker who owned the estate of Clapham around which they clustered; John Venn, the inspirational vicar of Clapham; Zachary Macaulay, a businessman, former West

Indian slave overseer, and colonial governor; Hannah More, a one-time poet and playwright who became the leading popular publicist of evangelical social doctrines; and William Wilberforce, heir to a Yorkshire commercial fortune and a friend of Pitt the Younger. This little group founded a tradition of high-minded but practical public service that characterizes many British intellectual families even to the present day. They involved themselves in a wide variety of philanthropic enterprises: personal charity (Thornton gave away five-sixths of his income until he was married and one-third thereafter); Sunday schools and elementary education for the poor; prison reform; Sabbatarianism (banning any nonreligious diversions on Sundays); and the *reformation of manners*—the suppression of what they regarded as immoral activities such as dueling, gambling, drunkenness, prostitution, blasphemy, and traditional blood sports. They also came out strongly against political radicalism after 1793. Hannah More, for instance, wrote a series of *Cheap Repository Tracts* preaching hard work and deference to laborers, the *Tracts* to be distributed to the poor by their betters.

THE ANTISLAVERY MOVEMENT

The greatest of all the Evangelical crusades was against slavery and the slave trade. When this crusade began in the 1780s, slavery was part and parcel of British life, even though a judicial ruling in 1772 had in effect made slavery illegal within England. In the second half of the eighteenth century, British ships carried over 40 percent of all African slaves across the Atlantic. Sugar harvested by slaves sweetened the British diet, tobacco cut by slaves burned in British pipes, cotton picked by slaves fueled the great Northern textile factories, and the profits generated by slaves percolated through British banks and paid for many of the splendid buildings that still grace the great slave ship ports of Liverpool, Bristol, and London. Even the Church of England owned slave plantations in the West Indies.

In 1774 John Wesley became the first British religious leader to denounce slavery with his pamphlet *Thoughts upon Slavery*, but he did not organize an antislavery campaign. That initiative arose from the ranks of the Quakers, who in 1783 became the first Christian denomination in Britain to condemn slavery. Their efforts achieved little notice, however, until they joined forces with Anglican Evangelicals in 1787. With Quaker businessmen providing financial support and Anglican Evangelicals utilizing their greater social and political influence (as members of the established church), the



Am I Not a Man and a Brother by Joseph Wedgwood (1787). One of the first political logos ever made, this seal was designed by pottery entrepreneur Joseph Wedgwood as a contribution to the abolitionist movement. It soon appeared on plates, buttons, and jewelry; by buying these items, women and men without the vote could participate in the political process.

antislavery movement became a prominent political force in British society. Over the next few years, the campaign originated many of the tactics now common to political pressure groups: it devised the first political logo, a kneeling slave begging for help; it distributed the first modern political poster, a diagram showing the way slaves were packed into the hold of a typical slave ship; it generated paintings, hymns, and what would now be called protest songs; it mobilized women and men without the vote through popular petitions and rallies; and it organized a nationwide boycott of slave-grown sugar.

The leader of the Saints' antislavery campaign was William Wilberforce (1759–1833), who worked tirelessly against slavery in and out of Parliament for almost fifty years. Wilberforce converted to Evangelicalism as a young man; thereafter, he devoted himself to the eradication from British life of those practices he saw as sins or as conducive to sin. He organized the Proclamation Society (later the Society for the Suppression of Vice) in 1787. But if he was something of a killjoy, he also led the British parliamentary elite to see what should have been obvious—the cruelty and horror of slavery—and he persuaded them to reject the pleas of the powerful West Indian slavery interest. Parliament finally abolished the slave trade throughout the British Empire in 1807 and slavery itself in the British Empire in 1833.

ROMANTICISM

The equivalent in high culture of evangelical emotionalism was the Romantic movement. Between 1780 and 1830, British writers, painters, and architects produced a body of work steeped in emotion and miraculous in quantity and quality. The romantics fashioned works that have provided for

countless literate men and women an image of what it means to be British—a pastoral, nonindustrial, nostalgic vision. The romantic tradition pitted *nature* against *artifice*, the organism against the machine, the past against the present, and so provided the inspiration for continuing and profound critique of urban industrial life.

How is this wonderful flowering of culture to be explained? Despite their claims to be setting out eternal truths, the romantics were deeply engaged with their times, and it is in that engagement—sometimes enthusiastic, sometimes highly critical—that the explanation is to be found. First, there was political revolution. Almost all the British romantic poets at one time or another found the events of France to be exhilarating. The French Revolution seemed to be liberating humanity from ancient bonds and to be drawing all the social and political lines anew. As William Wordsworth wrote,

But Europe at that time was thrilled with joy,
France standing on the top of golden hours,
And human nature seeming born again.

Yet the British romantics were sensitive to a wide variety of political and social changes. Economic expansion, population explosion, and the destruction of traditional social relations all gave them a sense of rapid transformation. Static views of nature would no longer do; dynamic views would have to replace them. Thus, the romantics, whether radical or conservative, developed a strong sense of historical change and committed themselves to philosophies emphasizing the living, organic quality of nature. Likewise, the static formulas of classical art no longer seemed appropriate. As Wordsworth put it, the times demanded a new kind of art: a “multitude of causes, unknown to former times” were reducing the mind “to a state of almost savage torpor.” Among these causes were great national events, the accumulation of men in cities, the uniformity of occupations, and a “craving for extraordinary incident,” all of which required as an antidote poetry that is “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.”

Next, the new commercial and industrial society—and the utilitarian philosophy that went with it—seemed to convey a one-dimensional view of human life and to leave no room for the arts. The romantics reacted against this confinement by aggressively asserting the primacy of art and of a life devoted to it. They sharply pitted art against the pursuit of riches—“the God and Mammon of the world.” This reaction contributed to the image of the romantic hero, with whom the poets and painters identified, the genius who defies conventional rules and asserts special power and insight into the world.

Closely related to economic change was a fourth cause of romanticism—the growth of commercial market for writing. As we saw in chapter 5, art was being commodified during the eighteenth century. As the economy expanded, the middle class grew and generated a demand for literature as well as for instruction and information. The market for fine arts took the place of aristocratic patronage. Many artists reacted against the dictates of this commercial market by insisting on the higher status of art and the independence of individual artistic genius. They claimed that the poet or painter has a special faculty—the imagination—that is superior to reason and offers special insights into nature or the cosmos. The imagination illuminates, or even creates, reality rather than simply mirroring it. It moves in the realm of the strange and finds magic in the commonplace.

THE ENGLISH ROMANTIC POETS

The English romantic poets may be divided into two generations. The first generation included William Blake (1757–1827), William Wordsworth (1770–1850), and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834). Blake was not only the first, but also the most unusual of the first generation in that he was trained as an artisan. A master engraver, Blake expressed his prophetic vision in highly symbolic poems illustrated by his own magnificent engravings. He was a self-conscious visionary, “the Bard/who Present, Past, & Future sees.” The vision revolved around an unorthodox but intense brand of Christianity, his often prophetic poems dealing with the creation, fall, and redemption of humanity. Blake saw the French Revolution as a violent force that foretold the final apocalypse, when humanity would overcome its fragmented and isolated existence. That fragmentation, he believed, was in part the result of industrialization, the advent of “dark Satanic Mills,” which Blake defied:

I shall not cease from Mental Fight
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England’s green and pleasant land.

Wordsworth began his career in a similar enthusiasm for the French Revolution, but he turned eventually to deeply religious and conservative poetry. He became the most English of poets, often celebrating the calming quiet of the English countryside, and was made poet laureate in 1843. Wordsworth and Coleridge as young men published the poetic manifesto of English romanticism in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). In the “Preface” to *Lyrical*

Ballads, Wordsworth announced a new style in poetry, throwing over Augustan decorum in favor of language “really used by men.” This was considered radical at the time, but by 1798 Wordsworth had already become disillusioned by the French Revolution. He rejected extreme rationalism and resorted to “the wisdom of the heart.” Thereafter, he taught the healing power of nature, especially in particular experiences of everyday life in which a person can enjoy sudden insight into the supernatural:

There are in our existence spots of time
Which with distinct pre-eminence retain
A renovating virtue, whence . . . our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired.

Coleridge was the ablest philosopher among the English romantic poets. As a young man, he was a radical empiricist in philosophy and religion and even dreamed of establishing a utopian community in America. But in the later 1790s, Coleridge turned away from radicalism to Anglicanism and from empiricism to German Idealist philosophy. As an Idealist, he articulated what is implicit in most romantic poetry: that there is a realm of spirit that suffuses and transcends material objects. That transcendent reality, he said, is not known by the senses but by intuition. The mind participates in creating reality in the process of perception; it makes visible the mind of God. In poetry, the mind repeats “the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.” Thus, to Coleridge, the poetic imagination, not sensory perception, is the foundation of all knowledge.

The second generation of English romantic poets—Lord Byron (1788–1824), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), and John Keats (1795–1821)—were deeply influenced by Wordsworth and Coleridge, but they remained more radical than these two elder statesmen of the movement. As one of the most famous and notorious figures of the day—a kind of pop star of the literary world—Byron was the classic romantic hero who rejected orthodox behavior in both his life and his poetry. His poetic protagonists were moody, disdainful, isolated characters offering ironic criticism of current civilization. Byron died in 1824 in Greece, having taken up the cause of Greek independence from Turkey.

Shelley was also an extreme political radical and social nonconformist who fought all his life against what he saw as tyranny and oppression. Over time, Shelley became one of the most learned and philosophically abstract of poets. He took as his goal the moral reform of humanity through the power of his art. His masterpiece, *Prometheus Unbound* (1819), concerns the hero of Greek myth who stole fire from the gods on behalf of humanity;

in it Shelley showed how tyranny and oppression are the products of morally unreformed humankind. To Shelley, poets should be acknowledged as the “author to others of the highest wisdom, pleasure, virtue and glory,” for in modern times it is not knowledge and productive capacity that are needed, but the generous creative faculty—“the poetry of life”—which alone can free people from enslavement to the pursuit of material gain.

In his short life as a poet, Keats wanted to re-create sensuous beauty for its own sake and as a symbol for the life of the spirit. It was Keats who gave the most elevated statements of the romantic exaltation of the aesthetic imagination: “What the imagination seizes as Beauty, must be truth”; “Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”

Probably the most well-known text to come out of the second generation of English Romantics was not, however, a poem but a short novel: *Frankenstein* (1818). The daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and the wife of Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley (1797–1851) was only twenty years old when she wrote the story of the idealistic scientist Victor Frankenstein who uses his scientific knowledge to create life, but then rejects that life as monstrous and pays in full for his actions. By setting himself above and against nature, Frankenstein violated the primary romantic credo of a life lived in harmony with natural and spiritual life forces. Frankenstein’s monster stands as the creation of human intellect detached from the very qualities that make us most human, according to the romantics: soul, spirit, the quest for beauty.

ROMANTICISM IN WALES AND SCOTLAND

The Augustan Age had been a time of integration of provincial cultures into the English cultural mainstream throughout the British Isles. Enlightened thinkers in the British Isles helped create an arena of public discourse common to Britain as a whole. But the Romantic movement, though it crossed national borders, gave rise to cultural nationalist reactions in Wales and Scotland. In both countries, the romantic interest in the strange, the picturesque, and the remote led to delving in the literary and historical past. As early as the 1750s, Welsh expatriates in London founded the Cymmrodorion Society to carry out antiquarian studies. A more radical group of London Welsh founded the Society of Gwyneddigion in the 1770s. It published Welsh literature in the Middle Ages, including an edition of the medieval Welsh poet Dafydd ap Gwilym. One of the collaborators in this effort was a stonemason-turned-scholar, Iolo Morganwg, who made a career for himself as the

prototype of the Welsh bard while fabricating a number of “ancient” texts. The main result of romanticism in Wales was the revival of the *eisteddfod*—the traditional meeting of the bards and celebration of popular culture, all of which took place in Welsh. This was accompanied by a renewed affection for druidism, seen by the romantics as an authentic religion of nature. In Wales, then, the fifty years after 1780 were a period of revival for purely Welsh traditions in high culture as well as Methodism in popular culture.

In Scotland, there was similar interest in traditional literature and legends, including those of the Highlands. But the great days of Highland culture were over. The best Gaelic poets had flourished in the mid-eighteenth century, and the Ossian epic, the most famous Highland “medieval” manuscript, was a forgery. Neither of the two primary Scottish romantic writers—Robert Burns (1759–96) and Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832)—wrote in Gaelic. Burns composed some poems in elegant English, but he cast his most vivid and memorable work in the Lowland Scots tongue; for this he became the national poet of Scotland. Born the son of a poor tenant farmer in southwestern Scotland, Burns by sheer determination made himself into a well-read man. In his poetry he was able to combine the best of Lowland Scots folk ballads and lyrics with English poetic style. His short poems and songs—including “To a Louse,” “Scots Wha Hae,” “For A’ That and A’ That,” and “Auld Lang Syne”—written in the language of ordinary people with marvelous zest and heartiness, deal with common events and emotions: love, hard drink, friendship, radicalism, and patriotism. Burns was greeted by the English romantics as the primitive plowman-poet. As Byron said of him, Burns was “tenderness and roughness—delicacy, coarseness—sentiment, sensuality—soaring and grovelling, dirt and deity—all mixed up in that one compound of inspired clay.”

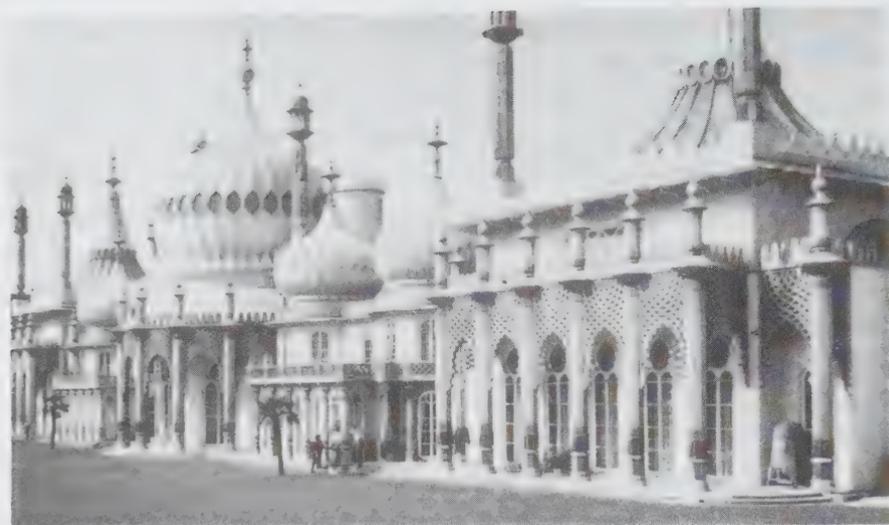
Sir Walter Scott was from the Lowland region near the English border, but he assimilated Highland as well as Lowland history and legend. In both his poetry and his fiction he created romantic historical pictures that won enormous popularity—and a great fortune that Scott spent in trying to live in the style of a feudal lord. His *Waverley* novels, including *Waverley* (1814), *Rob Roy* (1818), and *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), provide dramatic historical portraits of Scottish life in the age of the Covenanters and Jacobites. More than anyone else, Scott revived English and Scottish interest in Highland clan culture—a safe thing to do because the clans by then had been tamed, and besides Scott preached accommodation with Britain, not defiance.

The Tory Scott drew sympathetic portraits of Jacobitism in his novels, but his message was essentially one of social and political harmony, and for that he was rewarded. In 1820 he was made a baronet, and in 1822 he acted as the manager of pageantry for King George IV's magnificent state visit to Scotland. By then the Hanoverian line thought it right to wear Highland kilts! During the war against the French Revolution, the British monarchy had been made the focus of patriotic ceremony, and now it served as a device for creating a *union of hearts* between the English and the Scots. As nostalgia for the Highlands became popular, English and Lowland Scottish textile firms did a big business in concocting the whole scheme of clan tartans that prevails in the popular mind even today. Scott, then, contributed mightily to Scottish national consciousness, but in the context of a somewhat bogus, commercialized, and domesticated vision of gallant Highland chiefs and their loyal clan warriors.

BRITISH ROMANTIC ARCHITECTURE AND PAINTING

The romantic interest in the natural, the remote, the picturesque, and the exotic encouraged architects to call on a number of different historical traditions. The parks surrounding the homes of country gentlemen, with their newly constructed temples, “medieval” bridges, and Gothic ruins, showed this sensibility, for they were carefully designed to look natural and unplanned while including items meant to recall the wonders of the past. Many architects continued to draw on the classical tradition, ancient Greece especially being regarded as the epitome of noble simplicity. For example, John Nash (1752–1835) created imaginative and picturesque city villas in the classical style. Yet Nash also designed the Royal Pavilion in Brighton (1815–18) in a bizarre Indian style (cupcake domes, fantasy minarets, and lace doily interiors) inspired by the “stately pleasure dome” of Coleridge's poem “Kubla Kahn.”

The tradition most favored by British romantic architects, however, was the Gothic. Augustan taste had held that the Gothic was barbarous, but the British of the Romantic period were drawn to its irregularity, its lack of symmetry, its religious aspirations, and its rustic quality. To the romantic sensibility, the medieval society that had produced the Gothic increasingly seemed attractive because it was “natural” and not reduced to the formulas of pure reason. Gothic architecture, whose monuments stood in varying states of decay all around the British Isles, thus represented not only the his-



The Royal Pavilion, Brighton, designed by John Nash. The Royal Pavilion is an example of English Regency romanticism at its most fanciful.

torically remote, but also the sublime and the mysterious. As early as the mid-1700s, Horace Walpole rebuilt his home, Strawberry Hill, in the Gothic style: plenty of turrets, towers, battlements, and pointed arches over the windows. Most of the Gothic buildings of the Romantic period were homes, from thatched-roof cottages to sprawling manors, of which the most imposing was Fonthill Abbey, built between 1796 and 1807 by James Wyatt for a millionaire (alas, its 276-foot tower collapsed in 1825). The Gothic came to be regarded as the English national style of building, in part no doubt because it recalled past times when the laboring poor stayed in their place.

British painters also reacted against the formalism and artificial qualities of Augustan art in order to express the new taste for the drama and strangeness of life. A painter as well as a poet, William Blake created an awesome mythological world in his visionary engravings and watercolors, whereas John Henry Fuseli (1741–1825), a Swiss émigré living in London, painted mysterious Gothic nightmares from the darkest regions of the mind. But the two greatest British romantic painters were both landscape artists: John Constable (1776–1837) and J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851). Constable seems to have been the Wordsworth of painting—a careful observer of the familiar localities of the English countryside. Constable's paintings have a calming effect, not because they are sedate, but because his landscapes are filled with divine benevolence. This he expressed with free techniques in oil that endowed the landscape with light, life, and movement. Turner, on the



The Hay-Wain, by John Constable. Nature and the English countryside depicted by the best-known of the English romantic painters. In Constable's work, humanity and human commodities are absorbed into the wider natural (and supernatural) world.

other hand, painted nature's violence in powerful canvases that Constable called "airy visions, painted with tinted steam." In his immensely powerful paintings of storms in mountain passes and on the sea, Turner showed nature at its most violent and even catastrophic, a living thing beyond the control of human reason.

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Part **III**

The Rise of
Victorian Society

1815–1870

Chapter 13

The Emerging Class Society, 1815–1850

The British landed oligarchy survived the French Revolution with its status and its hold on the positions of power intact. Yet the incessant forces of the Triple Revolution—agricultural, demographic, and industrial—were too powerful to be confined to the old channels of a hierarchical society, particularly because the landowners set aside their paternalist role during the war against the French. In the half-century after 1815, industrialization accelerated and widened the British lead as the most powerful nation on earth, but it also drew into its vortex ever-widening circles of the traditional economy. Growing numbers of people swarmed into the urban areas. Remnants of the social hierarchy of preindustrial Britain crumbled away, and over time broad, self-conscious, and mutually antagonistic societal layers—landed class, middle class, and working class—formed and hardened. These trends generated severe social tensions and gave Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century an air of crisis; yet in the 1850s and 1860s the tensions eased and the sense of crisis passed. The result was one of the most remarkable civilizations in modern Western history—Victorian society (so named because of the monarch, Queen Victoria, who reigned but did not rule from 1837 to 1901).

The Victorians still have the reputation of being earnest, moralistic, complacent, and hypocritical. This reputation is partly the result of the very strong negative reaction against Victorianism that occurred in the early twentieth century, but it is also partly due to a failure to appreciate the gravity and novelty of the problems the Victorians faced and to an overly narrow focus on one element of Victorian society: the middle-class English male. It is important not to forget the other social classes of Victorian Britain, the people of what came to be called the “Celtic fringe” (Scotland, Wales, and Ireland), and women of all social orders and nationalities. But even if one

looks at the English middle class alone, contradiction and complexity come into view. They were proud and even arrogant people, but they were also bedeviled by self-doubts and social concerns and divided by gender. They prided themselves on the evolution of parliamentary government, but they liked deferential behavior by the working class. They believed in individualism, but were profoundly conformist. They congratulated themselves on progress, but were deeply concerned that change was destroying their society. They were very religious, but increasingly obsessed with their own religious doubts. Such complexity presents many challenges to historians—above all how to explain the formation of a stable, coherent society out of economic and social change of an unprecedented scope and pace.

BRITISH AND IRISH POPULATIONS, 1815–1850

As we have already noted, one of the most important social facts of early nineteenth-century Britain was the rapid growth of the population. As Table 13.1 shows, if we take the census of 1821 as the starting point, the British and Irish population grew 31 percent by 1851.

This population was increasingly *English*. It is worth remembering that the British nation of 1815—formally entitled the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was not very old. The union between England and Scotland had occurred only in 1707 and that with Ireland only in 1801. The English dominated this young nation. Throughout the nineteenth century and to a degree even until our own times, both the English and foreigners commonly called Britain “England.” To an extent, the population figures justified this practice, for the proportion of the British people living in England increased from 54 percent in 1821 to 62 percent in 1851, a fact explained in part by the disastrous effect of the Irish famine and in part by the net inflow

Table 13.1: British and Irish Population 1821–1851 (in millions)

	1821	1831	1841	1851
England	11.3	13.1	15.0	16.9
Wales	.7	.8	.9	1.0
Scotland	2.1	2.4	2.6	2.9
Ireland	6.8	7.8	8.2	6.6
Total	20.9	24.1	26.7	27.4

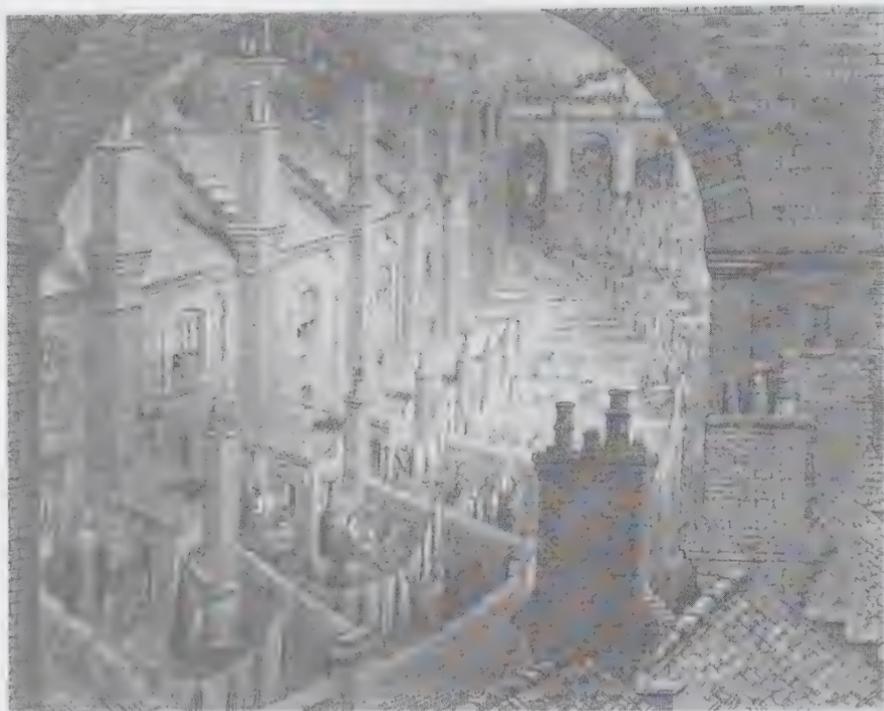
Source: Chris Cook and John Stevenson, *Longman Handbook of Modern British History, 1714–1980* (London, Longman, 1983), pp. 96–97.

of Irish and Scots into England. By 1851, for instance, there were approximately 600,000 people of Irish birth in England and more than 250,000 of Scottish birth.

Of more importance in the *Englishness* of the British was English cultural domination. Because England was the wealthiest and most powerful segment of Britain, its culture exerted steady pressure on the Celtic peoples. If an individual anywhere in the British Isles wanted to succeed in business or to cut a figure in fashion or politics, he or she had to be proficient in English. Likewise, English was the official language of government and law, and the British government tended to promote schooling in English in Celtic areas. Thus, an increasing majority of the British peoples spoke English and not one of the Celtic languages. In Scotland, the proportion of Gaelic speakers fell as the Highland Clearances took their toll, from about 20 percent in 1801 to 10 percent in 1861. In Ireland, about 50 percent of the people spoke Irish as their main language in 1801; by 1851, only about 23 percent of the Irish did so. In Wales, the overwhelming majority of people spoke Welsh in 1801, but as Welsh industrial areas were integrated into the English economy and English and Irish workers emigrated to Wales, the percentage of Welsh speakers declined. In 1891, only 54 percent of the Welsh people spoke Welsh.

Urbanization was the other great feature of British population growth in the first half of the nineteenth century. The flood of people into the cities and towns that began in the late eighteenth century continued in the nineteenth. By 1851, for the first time, 50 percent of the British population (not counting Ireland) lived in towns, and 34 percent lived in towns of over 20,000. By 1851, there were nine cities with more than 100,000 each: London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Glasgow, Bristol, Sheffield, and Bradford. With 2.4 million people, London was home for a larger portion of the British population (excluding Ireland) than ever—11.5 percent. Outside of London, the population tended to collect in the heavy industrial regions of the Midlands and the North of England, in the Scottish Lowlands (a wide belt from Edinburgh to Glasgow), and in South Wales.

Unplanned, unregulated, and horrifically unhealthy, these heaving cities epitomized the economic energy and social inequality of nineteenth-century Britain. In most cases, the working-class districts stood cheek-by-jowl with factories and warehouses. These districts almost invariably became squalid slums with high mortality rates. Such housing as was available was built by private construction contractors, responding to working-class demand in



Over London by Rail, by Gustave Doré. The artist has shown the backs of working-class houses in early Victorian London.

the free market. In their natural drive for profit, the contractors cut corners on space and construction, cramming as many houses into the smallest possible area. Typically, the houses were of the back-to-back variety: rows of small two-level houses that were one room deep and that backed up on each other so as to share a common rear wall. Often these rows of houses were laid out around dark, airless “courts,” in which were located the common privy and water spigot. Bleak as such housing was, it was far better than the cramped tenements and foul cellars into which hundreds of thousands of the poorest city dwellers swarmed.

Manchester was the greatest of the industrial cities and the prototype of the early urban industrial environment—the “shock city of the Industrial Revolution.” It grew from 95,000 to over 300,000 between 1801 and 1851. As the center of Britain’s cotton industry, Manchester was busy, productive, and noisy, humming with thousands of spindles in great smoky mills. It was also crowded and largely without paving, sewerage, or water supply for its working-class denizens. Built at the junction of three rivers (the Irwell, the

Irk, and the Medlock, all of which had turned oily black from pollution), Manchester became a jungle of narrow, filthy, cramped streets and alleys. The great French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville visited Manchester in 1835:

From this foul drain the greatest stream of human industry flows out to fertilize the whole world. From this filthy sewer pure gold flows. Here humanity attains its most complete development and its most brutish; here civilization works its miracles, and civilized man is turned back almost into a savage.

The young German cotton manufacturer (and close friend of Karl Marx) Friedrich Engels was similarly shocked by what he saw in Manchester in the early 1840s: a labyrinthine collection of wretched industrial and working-class slums. The well-to-do had moved outward in order to spare themselves the horrors of the town, but in the inner city, the poor lived amid their own stench and filth. In many crowded districts, he wrote, “the inhabitants can only enter or leave the court by wading through puddles of stale urine and excrement.” Everywhere he saw pollution and decay: “filth, ruination and uninhabitableness.” In such appalling conditions lived a growing proportion of Britain’s industrial population.

THE BRITISH ECONOMY, 1815–1850

The British economy in the early Victorian years continued its startling growth, but it was afflicted with alternating short-term cycles of boom and slump. The gross national product (GNP, the annual total of all goods and services produced) went up by more than 300 percent in the forty years between 1810 and 1850. The annual growth rate of the economy averaged more than 2.5 percent—more than twice as fast as in the early 1700s. Agriculture did well, but industry drove the expansion. Capital invested in productive capacity tripled between 1800 and 1860. Exports streamed out of Britain’s workshops, factories, and mines, increasing 400 percent between 1800 and 1850. By today’s standards, Britain’s industrial growth in the early nineteenth century may have been moderate, but by the standards of the day it was both astonishing and unique.

Even as late as 1850, Britain remained the only industrialized nation in the world; thus, it dominated world trade. In 1850, the British enjoyed nearly 25 percent of the world’s commerce. In the mechanized production of cotton and woolen textiles, pottery, iron machinery, steam engines, firearms, cutlery, and pots and pans, the British simply faced no competition. This fact shaped Britain’s overseas trade patterns. The British typically

exchanged manufactured goods (cotton textiles above all) for primary products, that is, foodstuffs and raw materials. This exchange was all in Britain's favor because foreign buyers could obtain manufactured articles from them alone; hence, the British needed no elaborate marketing strategies or skills. In addition, the British increased their earnings from *invisible income*—the profits from overseas banking and investment and from trade itself: shipping, insurance, docks, warehouses, and brokerage.

These patterns shaped governmental policies toward trade. The nineteenth century was the era of free trade in British history. British industry and commerce did not need tariff protection; they needed conditions in which British goods had open access to foreign markets and in which foreigners could sell their products in Britain to earn the money with which to buy British industrial goods. Free trade was the obvious policy for Britain, and British industrial captains and their spokesmen, known as the Manchester School of economics, vigorously promoted free enterprise and free trade. Though the Corn Law of 1815 remained on the books until 1846, British governments of both parties otherwise moved steadily toward abolition of import duties and other restrictions on trade. William Huskisson, a Tory president of the Board of Trade, abolished a number of restrictive policies in 1822 and at the same time negotiated several reciprocal trade treaties by which Britain and foreign countries mutually reduced import duties. The trading monopolies of most of the old chartered companies such as the Royal African Company and the East India Company were ended. The Navigation Laws were repealed in 1849. In this context, the Corn Law of 1815 stood out as an anomalous and divisive issue through the early 1840s.

The undeniable success of British capitalism in expanding output was marred by periodic depressions. The state took little role in guiding or regulating economic growth; hence, businessmen acted not only in self-interest, but also without adequate information in their highly volatile economic environment. Industrial capitalism was as yet such a new phenomenon that speculation and fraud were as common as enterprise, and sudden failure was as frequent as success. Recessions or depressions followed boom periods with bewildering speed. Almost immediately after peace was attained in 1815, for example, demand rapidly deflated and a depression set in until 1821. From that year until 1836 the economy expanded feverishly, but overspeculation and overinvestment broke the fever, causing a severe depression—the worst in the nineteenth century—from 1836 to 1842. Thereafter, the economy began to recover, though times remained very hard through the mid-1840s.

Each of the downturns in the trade cycle threw people out of work. Statistics on unemployment in the period are very unreliable, but one can be certain that substantial numbers of people were unemployed or underemployed at all times and that the so-called reserve army of unemployed went up drastically in bad years. For instance, in Bolton (a cotton town), unemployment among mill workers reached 60 percent in 1842 and stood even higher among construction workers. In general, factory operatives probably enjoyed more regular employment than most others, including skilled craftspersons, few of whom escaped unemployment for part of each year. This vulnerability to the seemingly uncontrollable trade cycles was one of the gravest psychological pressures shouldered by early nineteenth-century urban workers.

Unemployment and underemployment were two of the reasons why, on the whole, material standards of living did not improve until the 1850s. Average output per capita and income per capita were increasing, and at the same time, the long-term trend of prices after 1815 was downward. Yet these promising trends did not improve standards of living for most working people before mid-century. A greater share of the national income went toward profits and rents and away from wages, and a somewhat higher proportion of the nation's wealth was put to investment rather than to consumption. Furthermore, as we have seen in chapter 10, some occupational groups such as the handloom weavers suffered dramatic reductions in their wages, both because of overcrowding in the trade and because of competition with machine manufacturing. For all these reasons, the material benefits of industrialization for most working people were long delayed. As the great social critic Thomas Carlyle put it, the economy seemed "enchanted." Britain was like Midas with the golden touch: there was work to be done, but people stood unemployed; there was wealth all around, but the poor suffered hunger and degradation.

The industries that led the initial burst of mechanization—cotton, coal, and iron—were joined from the 1820s by a new industry, the railways. Because railways used over three hundred tons of iron rails per mile, consumed vast quantities of coal, and employed thousands of unskilled as well as skilled workers in vast feats of civil engineering, their effects reverberated right through the economy. Beginning in 1825, a steam engine was used to pull wagons on iron rails for the twelve miles between Stockton and Darlington. The opportunities for cheap and fast transportation of goods and passengers became obvious to private entrepreneurs. In the next ten years a *railway mania* swept the country (except Ireland); Parliament



Excavation of the Olive Mount on the Liverpool to Manchester Railway, by Thomas Valentine Roberts. This remarkable painting shows not only an early railway engine, but also the huge task of civil engineering required for railway construction.

authorized private companies to build fifty-four new lines. The depression of 1836–37 slowed construction, but after 1845, railway building began again. By 1850, more than five hundred railway companies had come into existence and had completed the trunk of the British railway system: more than six thousand miles of track stretching from Penzance to Aberdeen. This second burst of railway building pulled Britain out of the “Hungry ’40s.”

The railways tied the regions of Britain more tightly together than any force, political or economic, ever had done (or would do, until the world wars and television). Businessmen expanded their markets into all corners of the country. Perishable goods such as milk, beer, and fish could be processed in one place and sold in cities hundreds of miles away. Travel for ordinary middle-class people became a reality, not least because an act of the 1844 Parliament required the railways to run at least one cheap train a day on every line. Commuting by rail was still a thing of the future, but day outings from the cities to the countryside became a common feature of life for bourgeois families as early as the 1840s. By 1850, nearly any place in Britain (excluding Ireland, where railways were constructed later) was reachable within a day from any other place. In 1854, for instance, travel time from London to Plymouth was only seven hours; to Manchester, five and one-half hours; and to Edinburgh, eleven hours. London newspapers put on the early morning trains were being read by late afternoon all over the country.

THE LANDED CLASS: ARISTOCRACY AND GENTRY

The nation that was being knitted together by the bonds of iron rails was at the same time slowly dividing into social classes—broad layers of people who shared similar experiences, ways of life, and values and who understood themselves as having interests conflicting with those of other broad social groups. These classes, of course, did not exist as material objects, but as cultural constructions. They were none the less real for that. Class identity offered one way for individuals to find their place in the industrial society that was taking shape around them. The idea that the interests of workers clashed with those of their middle-class bosses provided, for many, an appealing way to make sense of their experiences. Older ways of articulating social identity did not disappear, however. Many political radicals, for example, perceived the middle and working classes in terms of solidarity rather than conflict: “the People,” who stood against “the Privileged,” the hereditary landed elite. Moreover, the social hierarchies and status ladders that, as we have seen, structured eighteenth-century society, remained intact, still useful ways of articulating social experience and organizing social relationships. As the nineteenth century progressed, however, *class* increasingly pushed these other social perceptions aside. The story of Britain in the nineteenth century is the story of the emergence of a class society.

At the top of this emerging class society stood the landed class. One might think that the aristocracy and gentry could not flourish in the new world of industries, towns, and class conflict, but in the short run they did. British landowners enjoyed high rental income in the first half of the nineteenth century, and they also benefited both from their investments in industry and from the vast increase in the price of real estate they owned in and around the big cities. Landowners frequently cooperated with developers to make large profits on new urban housing districts. The dukes of Bedford, Portland, and Westminster, for example, each received more than £50,000 a year (the equivalent of about \$7.5 million today) from ground rents in London. As late as the 1880s, more than half of the wealthiest men in Britain got their money from land. Of course, not all the landowners were so wealthy. Nevertheless, the aristocracy—some three hundred families headed by dukes, marquesses, earls, viscounts, and barons—all owned more than ten thousand acres and enjoyed at least £10,000 a year. All had palatial country homes and large, elegantly decorated townhouses in London. Most owned hunting lodges as well.

The landed gentry, of which there were about three thousand families, owned between one thousand and ten thousand acres and earned £1,000 to £10,000 a year. Their fine homes dappled the countryside: handsome halls, often in the Gothic style, with upward of twenty rooms. Each was set in a fine park and maintained by a platoon of stewards, housekeepers, gamekeepers, cooks, gardeners, grooms, stable boys, chambermaids, and scullery girls, all arranged in a self-contained social hierarchy, all arranged in a self-contained social hierarchy.

Life in these country houses was extremely pleasant for the landed gentlemen and their families. Aristocrats and country gentlemen alike, as well as their wives and daughters, shunned work as demeaning to high status. Being a gentleman (or lady) meant inheriting the bloodlines of fine families, but it also meant inheriting wealth, most of it based on landed property. Having inherited his income, the landowner could occupy himself in pleasurable pursuits: visiting and entertaining the neighbors; reading in his library; walking and riding in the garden and park; and above all, indulging in field sports. Many landowners spent nearly all their waking hours fishing, shooting, horse racing, and fox hunting. Field sports seemed to celebrate the military virtues of courage and prowess that had once been essential to the feudal nobility.

Landowners spent vast sums on maintaining hunting preserves and keeping sporting horses and dogs. Fox hunting in particular became a well-organized and highly ritualized sport for the Victorian aristocracy and gentry. By custom, the rural districts of Britain were divided into territories (or "countries") hunted by particular groups of landowners. Each hunt country was designated by the pack of foxhounds kept in it: the Belvoir, the Beaufort, the Durham County, and so on. Sometimes one landowner carried the heavy expense of maintaining the hunt servants and pack of hounds, but in many places the hunt was sustained by subscription. In either case, the fox hunters claimed the right of access to all land in the area, as well as protection of the foxes for them alone to kill. In those areas where tenant farmers joined the hunt, the hunt meetings expressed the coherence of country life. Often, however, tenants could only stand by to see their crops trampled by the horses and hounds, in which case the hunt revealed the true inequalities of landed society.

When the landed gentleman was not engaged in field sports, he was apt to be involved in public service. Disinterested service to local society as justice of the peace (JP), overseer of the Poor Law, officer of the yeomanry, patron of the parish church, and supporter of village charities was thought

to be the privilege and obligation of the landed proprietors. Until the last decade of the century, the landed gentry kept local government in their own hands throughout the rural districts. As one description of a widely admired gentleman shows, the “manly” virtues of hunting and the selfless virtues of public service formed the ideal of the country landlord:

His character—personal appearance and habits—impetuosity of temper—generosity of disposition—skill in games and sport—kindness to animals and liberality to his servants—his strong sense of justice—high character as Master of Hounds, and as a daring horseman—testimony of his contemporaries.

This notion of the ideal gentleman was part of a revived aristocratic ideology. Although some landowners abandoned paternalism and adopted political economy following the anxiety-ridden years of the French Revolution, others in the landed orders rehabilitated their belief in a hierarchical society and paternal care for the poor. In the interests of patriarchal order and social coherence, they explicitly criticized the individualistic social ideals of utilitarianism and political economy. As one aristocratic writer put it, Tory principles, “while they maintain the due order and proportion of each separate rank in society, maintain also that protection and support are the right of all.” This vision inspired, and was inspired by, a romantic nostalgia for medieval England. It set high store by the Church of England as the conscience of the state, a view best expressed by Coleridge in his *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1830). It also revitalized the chivalric idea of the gentleman. One group of Tory paternalists, including the future prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli, went so far as to articulate a new feudalism. This *Young England* movement of the 1840s not only argued on behalf of a natural alliance between aristocracy and poor, but also tried to revive medieval pageantry, including jousting in full armor!

In early Victorian Britain, the professions were satellites of the aristocracy and gentry. Initially, there were only four recognized professions: military/naval service, the church, law, and medicine. Over time, the number of occupations accepted as professions grew. In each case, the professionals regarded disinterested service rather than personal profit as their social ideal. The older professions, especially the officer corps of the military and the Anglican clergy, were recruited from the younger sons of the landed families. The officer corps thus tended to be arrogant and bold but, at least in the army, not technically proficient. The Anglican clergy closely identified with their landlord patrons. Indeed, the Church of England was regarded as “the Tory party at prayer.” The squire and the parson often were the dominant figures in rural society.

Yet the Church of England was changing. Evangelicalism infected High and Low Churchmen alike with a sense of seriousness and emotional commitment. Indeed, the new vitality of both the High and Low Church positions caused considerable tension in the parishes. Both despised the easygoing, liberal latitudinarians, but Low Churchmen wanted to see more evidence of emotional fervor and personal morality, whereas High Churchmen wanted to revive religiosity by returning to traditional rituals, ceremonies, and vestments. Both sides made the ordinary broad-shouldered, fox-hunting squire very uneasy. Most English gentlemen took religion as a matter of social propriety and habit, an institution to be observed but not to be thought deeply about.

The educational institutions of the aristocracy and gentry were shaped by the fact that these social orders still formed a hereditary ruling elite. Elite schools and universities needed to give no training for an occupation, but rather social polish and habits of authority. Most boys from the landed class went to one of the nine famous “public” schools—private boarding schools such as Eton, Harrow, and Winchester. (Public schools for girls sprang up after mid-century.) The school curriculum consisted almost exclusively of lessons in Latin and Greek language and literature—the *classics*. More practical subjects were despised as *utilitarian*, fit only for boys going into trade. Sports such as distance running, football, and cricket were as important as scholarship, for they taught character and self-discipline. Studies were not the highest priority. As Thomas Arnold, the most famous public school headmaster, said, “What we must look for . . . is 1st, religious and moral principles; 2ndly, gentlemanly conduct; 3rdly, intellectual ability.”

A university education was not necessary for the sons of the landed elite, but it was often thought to be desirable. Oxford and Cambridge were extremely expensive, and they remained the only English universities until the University of London was founded in 1836. Scotland’s four universities were more accessible to young men of modest wealth, but Oxford and Cambridge were by far the most prestigious institutions of higher education in Britain by dint of their rich tradition and their connection with the Church of England. They were partly seminaries and partly advanced finishing schools for boys from landed and professional families. Many of the aristocratic youths who attended Oxford or Cambridge never bothered to sit for examinations or to take a degree. Of the students who did earn the BA, a majority went into the clergy. The teaching faculty of the universities—the college tutors—had to be ordained ministers of the Church of England, and most of them expected to have careers not as professional academics but as

parish priests. Consequently, the *Oxbridge atmosphere* reflected the lackadaisical attitude of the faculty and the drunken, fox-hunting extravagances of the wealthiest students.

Daughters of the aristocracy and gentry before the 1850s rarely went away to school and never to a university. They were educated at home by private tutors in such polite subjects as music, sewing, literature, and French, in preparation for the day that they would become wives, mothers, and hostesses in landed households. It was unthinkable for a woman from the landed orders to have a career. At the same time, custom gave aristocratic women considerable personal freedom. Marriage, of course, was assigned to them as their goal in life, but wealthy daughters usually came into marriage with their own money. This was settled on them by their fathers and did not become the property of the husbands. Because having their own money liberated them from complete dependence on their husbands, aristocratic wives had considerable liberty to conduct themselves as they pleased, provided that they observed the rules of public propriety. Moreover, aristocratic women were less likely than their less well-off sisters to have fallen under the sway of evangelical morality. Hence, they often considered themselves free to travel, speak, and behave as they liked, provided only that they avoided scandal.

THE MIDDLE CLASS

Important as were the aristocracy and gentry, it was the middle class that formed the soul of Victorian Britain. “Never in any country beneath the sun,” wrote one middle-class newspaper editor, “was an order of men more estimable and valuable, more praised and praiseworthy, than the middle class of society in England.” Self-conscious and aggressive, middle-class men seemed bent on making Britain over in their own image. Middle-class women were every bit as important, for they shaped the homes and families and inculcated the moral virtues central to Victorianism.

The middle class grew as a proportion of the British population, from about 15 percent in 1820 to more than 20 percent in 1850—perhaps one million families, which ranged very widely in wealth. The richest bankers and commercial tycoons made as much as the wealthiest aristocrats, and the biggest industrialists only a little less. Hanging onto the bottom rung of the middle-class ladder were clerks, office workers, and shopkeepers, who earned only £100 to £150 a year. In income, these men and women of the lower middle class were not much better off than skilled artisans. For them,

the struggle to maintain middle-class status was unrelenting, the minimum income for a secure middle-class existence being about £300 a year. Yet if there was a huge income gap between the richest and poorest of the middle class, all of the men shared the qualities of working for a living (but not with their hands), of intense class consciousness, and of aspiration for a “respectable” lifestyle.

The middle-class style of life required both a house and servants. Clerks and shopkeepers normally had six-room semidetached houses and a maid and could keep their wives from working outside the home. At £300 a year, the middle-class family could have an eight- to ten-room suburban house and a garden, as well as a second maid and perhaps a cook. Three servants were necessary to relieve the mother and daughters of all work in the house; this was assured at £500 a year. The middle class thus was a servant-keeping class, for servants alone made possible the gentility and propriety of home and family cherished by business and professional people.

The better-off members of the middle class aspired to the wealth and status of the landed gentry. Men who made sufficiently large fortunes typically bought estates and retired from work. Few, however, made it that far up the economic scale. For most men, work remained central to their lives, and for many of them, that work was fraught with anxiety. The cycles of boom and bust that racked the early industrial economy made them feel that disaster lay just beyond the next day’s trade figures. Moreover, many industrial and commercial men had everything to lose because most businesses were family firms and because investors were liable for the losses of their firms to the full extent of their personal property. Limited liability companies were not legalized by Parliament until 1862. Given the competitiveness of early capitalism and the desire of middle-class males to rise in society, these business conditions dictated a life of hard work and self-denial. To the early Victorian bourgeois male, life was a battle in which the indecisive, the incompetent, and the unlucky lost out.

Victorian middle-class men and women alike wanted their homes to be a refuge from the harsh economic world. Indeed, they made a cult of the home and family. Where the world of trade and industry was public, competitive, and stressful, the home was to be private, supportive, and restful. Here, in the private sphere, women reigned supreme. Men assigned to their wives the task of ensuring that the household functioned smoothly to aid their daily recuperation from life’s struggle. In many cases, wives in less well-off middle-class families contributed significantly to establishing their family fortunes by working in the family business. But as soon as possible

women were relieved of gainful employment, and their heavy responsibilities in housework or managing a corps of servants were not seen as work at all. The fact that the husband, in theory, alone supported the family gave him irresistible authority. A revival of the patriarchal-style family was the inevitable result.

The role of women in the Victorian middle class ideally was restricted to the home and family. *Separate spheres*—the public for men and the private for women—were the generally accepted rule. Gainful employment for most middle-class women was out of the question; moreover, in England a married woman's property (including anything she brought into the marriage and any earnings) belonged to her husband. A woman was trapped in marriage even when it failed. Before the Marriage Act of 1857, divorce was impossible except by private act of Parliament. Even after 1857, women had to prove adultery *plus* bigamy, cruelty, desertion, incest, or unnatural sexual offenses to get a divorce. In addition, until the passage of the Custody of Infants Act in 1839, a woman lost access to her children if she divorced. In sexual mores as in marital law, a double standard prevailed: if a man engaged in sex outside marriage, he was thought to have offended respectability, but in an understandable and pardonable way; if a woman did likewise, her offense was beyond comprehension and unforgiveable. A “fallen woman” was ruined forever. Women were to be “undamaged goods” in a marriage; moreover, a woman was supposed to be the perfect guardian of morality—“the angel in the house.”

Women were regarded as by nature passionless. As the famous nurse and medical reformer Florence Nightingale, who herself dared to remain unmarried, declared in 1851: “Women don't consider themselves as human beings at all, there is absolutely no God, no country, no duty to them at all, except family.” To bear children (the average number per family being six), to rear them in morality, and to keep the home an orderly preserve for the male were the functions for which women were thought to be biologically and emotionally suited. As one preacher said, “Woman's strength lies in her essential weakness. She is at this hour what ‘in the beginning’ the great Creator designed her to be—namely, Man's help . . . accustomed from the first to ministrations of domestic kindness and the sweetest charities of home.”

Such remarks revealed the profound religiosity of middle-class life in Victorian Britain. The evangelical revival of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reinvigorated Nonconformity and called the middle class to seriousness. Indeed, evangelicalism played a crucial role in shaping the culture that became identified as middle class. The values and outlook



Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, and Their First Five Children, by Franz Winterhalter (1847). *The domestic ideal exemplified.*

of evangelical Nonconformity became those of the Victorian middle class. To be sure, not all middle-class people were Nonconformists; some were Anglicans. Nor were all Nonconformists of the middle class; Nonconformity had a hold on certain segments of the working class. Yet the degree of overlap between the middle class and Nonconformity—Baptists, Congregationalists, Wesleyan Methodists, Quakers, Presbyterians, and Unitarians—was substantial. And Nonconformity was growing: in 1851, about half of the adult population of England and Wales attended church, and almost half of those churchgoers were Nonconformists.

Nonconformity contributed to the sturdy individualism, the moralism, and the reformist drive of the middle class. Most Nonconformist denominations emphasized the right of the individual to read the Scriptures and to establish a personal relationship with God; they also insisted on the right of individual congregations to govern themselves. As evangelicals, most Nonconformists believed that sin and the devil were everywhere and that conformity to a strict moral code was necessary to fight them. As one observer

put it, in Nonconformity “pleasure is distrusted as a wife of the devil.” Nonconformists frowned on drink, dancing, and the theater, and they promoted Sabbatarianism (the policy of prohibiting trade and public recreation on Sundays). Nonconformists also felt aggrieved at the disabilities they suffered at the hands of the established Church: they had to pay rates to the Church of England; they could not be buried in parish churchyards; they had to be baptized and married in Anglican ceremonies; and until 1828, the Test and Corporation Acts made them second-class citizens. In these grievances they found a substantial agenda for reform.

Education was crucial to middle-class males, both because of their belief in individualism and because of their work in commerce, industry, and, increasingly, the professions. However, Nonconformists were excluded from Oxford and Cambridge, and many middle-class families found the old public schools impractical and expensive. Some middle-class males found the education they needed—English grammar, arithmetic, history, and foreign languages—at reformed *grammar schools*, which were endowed private day schools. Most, however, were educated at various new kinds of private tuition-supported schools that sprang up to meet the demand. Many of these were little more than one-room schools set up by enterprising teachers to give a rudimentary and utilitarian training to lower middle-class boys. Others, the *proprietary schools*, were established in fine buildings, often by subscriptions from the parents. Many of them at the outset taught “modern” subjects, but they tended over time to metamorphose into imitations of the ancient public schools. In turn, many of the public schools such as Rugby opened themselves to middle-class youth. The proprietary and public schools eventually had the effect of inculcating in the sons of well-to-do commercial and industrial families something of the values and attitudes of the landed gentry. They tended to lead boys away from middle-class occupations and into the professions; yet at the same time, these same schools helped pass on some of the middle-class devotion to work and morality to the sons of the landed orders.

It is important not to overestimate the speed at which the expensive private schools diluted the drive and force of the middle class. For one thing, there were few places in such schools; in 1868, fewer than twenty thousand boys were enrolled in all public, grammar, and proprietary schools together. For another, middle-class men had a very firm and resilient set of values and social ideals—an ideology and a sense of masculinity—that they promoted at every turn. These values and ideals were rooted deeply in both the

economic role and the religion of the middle class. To begin with, they valued a man by what he achieved rather than by the social stratum he was born into. They set high value on work, especially work of the entrepreneurial sort: active, enterprising, organizing, and directive work. By this measure they found the aristocracy to be idle and parasitic—"double-barreled dilettantes," in Carlyle's memorable phrase. They had a strange love-hate attitude toward the landed orders: they wanted not to destroy the aristocracy and gentry, but to take their places.

Yet middle-class males admired their own ability to get things done and despised the inherited elegance and patronage of the traditional elite. Middle-class people liked to see a constant increase in the outpouring of material goods, and they valued the entrepreneur who was responsible for it. They valued competition rather than patronage as the society's lubricant because they believed that competition maximized production and efficiency. Competition allowed the strongest individuals, businesses, institutions, and even ideas to thrive, while condemning the weak and outmoded to fall by the wayside.

A set of personal virtues followed from these values and defined "manliness." One was duty. The Victorian middle class had a strong sense of personal responsibilities that each person had a duty to fulfill. The main duty, for males at least, was to be as productive as possible and protective of females. Usefulness was a related virtue: the Victorians believed it was wrong to spend capital or energy on things or activities that were not useful to production and progress. Even art ought to be useful, by instructing, uplifting, or invigorating the mind. Thrift naturally was important because by thrift people avoided the waste of God-given talents and resources and maximized production. Similarly, prudence guided people toward the reasoned and cautious calculation of means and ends.

Perhaps the highest of all virtues for men was self-help. Middle-class Victorians idealized the self-made man, the man who independently took responsibility for making something of himself. They assumed that men could rise in life if they only would. Unfortunately, members of the middle class also tended to create a personal myth about themselves, namely that they *had* made themselves, forgetting, like Charles Dickens' famous character Josiah Bounderby, the contributions that other people and good luck made to their success. They assumed that social misery was the result of personal failings such as intemperance, imprudence, and sloth. Thus, their answer to social problems was often simply to exhort the poor to help themselves.

A very powerful political ideology derived from these middle-class values and ideals: *liberalism*. The specific content of liberalism will be examined in chapter 14. Suffice it to say here that liberalism was the great political movement of nineteenth-century Britain and that it was essentially the middle class's way of bringing Britain's social and political institutions into line with middle-class interests and values. Although the Liberal party was not founded until 1859, liberalism was at work from the early years of the century, and it operated within both the Whig and the Tory parties.

Liberals often disagreed over particular policies, but generally they believed in individualism and competition. They supported free enterprise, free trade, and free competition among religious sects. They opposed the privileges of the landed orders, though they devoutly upheld private property itself. They sought to create a free market in labor, not least by restricting or prohibiting trade unions; they also sought to spread education so as to make the individual's decisions free from ignorance and superstition. Most important, liberals wanted to reform the parliamentary system in order to make Parliament representative of the nation's reasoning individuals. Here is where Victorian ideas about gender locked liberals into a major inconsistency: women, they believed, must be excluded from the vote because they were like criminals, lunatics, and children in not being independent, self-responsible, and fully rational individuals. Otherwise, liberals generally favored extension of the franchise and codification of the laws. Individualism, utilitarianism, political economy, and evangelical Nonconformity were the taproots of liberal ideology, each growing in rich middle-class soil.

Even the monarchy conformed to middle-class values in Victorian Britain. By birth and social position, of course, Queen Victoria and her husband (and first cousin) Albert were members of the aristocracy; yet they had what was in many ways a middle-class marriage. Unlike her royal uncles with their myriads of mistresses and illegitimate children, Victoria doted on her duty-bound and serious-minded husband. Theirs was not a dual monarchy—Albert was prince regent, not king—but in the domestic affairs of the royal family, Albert possessed the supreme power. (And with Victoria frequently sidelined by pregnancy, he played an ever more dominant political role.) In an age of continental revolutions, the German-born Albert was well-aware that the position of royalty could be precarious and so he paid close attention to the public image of the royal family. Paintings and lithographs presented the queen and prince as a loving couple, fond but firm parents of an ever-expanding brood of offspring—a middle-class monarchy.

THE EMERGING WORKING CLASS

The early Victorian laboring population was not nearly as close-knit in experience or outlook as either the landed orders or the middle class. As chapter 14 will show, class consciousness spread within the working population only in the process of political agitation. For this reason, *working classes* is at least as good a term as *working class* to denote the laboring poor down to 1850; even as late as the 1870s, several large occupational groups such as agricultural laborers and domestic servants showed few signs of class identity. Still, it is possible to speak of the working class in early Victorian Britain in the sense of denoting all those who worked with their hands—approximately 75 to 80 percent of the total population. Some of these people made as much as £100 a year, and others less than £50, but all clearly stood below the ceiling that separated them from the middle class and landed folk. They were distinct from the upper classes by income, clothing, education, accent, and personal bearing, and anyone could spot the differences.

The working class comprised three broad categories: skilled artisans, semiskilled workers, and unskilled laborers. The skilled artisans amounted to 10 to 15 percent of all workers. Most artisans were males who still set high store by the male-bonding rituals of their apprenticeship and journeyman training. Many worked in old crafts such as plastering, printing, watchmaking, and cabinetry. Others worked in trades spun off by the new industries: locomotive engineering, machine-tool engineering, and certain special kinds of textile spinning. In all cases, artisans learned their skills through long apprenticeships. They were able to control the quality of their finished products and commanded fairly high wages, perhaps £100 in a good year. Many belonged to more-or-less secret trade unions and despised the “dishonorable” (nonunion) men who degraded their craft. Almost all of the artisans were literate, and they tended to be highly class conscious and political. Together, they formed an *aristocracy of labor* and the core of the self-conscious working class.

The semiskilled workers composed a largely new group interposed between the artisans and laborers. The Industrial Revolution generated a large number of jobs for both men and women in factories and shops that required a middle level of skill at the same time as it destroyed some traditional crafts such as handloom weaving. Coal miners can be included in this category, for although coal mining was an old industry, industrialization expanded it enormously. Mining was a highly differentiated trade, with

women and children doing many simple though backbreaking or mind-numbing tasks, and adult males, the hewers above all, doing work that required considerable knowledge as well as courage and stamina. Factory operatives made up the bulk of the semiskilled occupations. Most of them came from the ranks of agricultural labor. They were attracted to the factories by relatively high pay: about 30 shillings a week (£75 a year if fully employed) for seventy-two hours of hard and tedious work, as compared to 20 shillings per sixty-hour week for coal miners. Women were always paid less and generally were relegated to auxiliary tasks. All told, about 40 per cent of all workers held semiskilled positions by 1850.

Below the semiskilled workers in status and earnings was the mass of unskilled laborers, about one-half of the entire working class. These were the men, women, and children who did the staggering volume of work that is today done by machines. As Professor J. F. C. Harrison has written,

A vast amount of wheeling, dragging, hoisting, carrying, lifting, digging, tunneling, draining, trenching, hedging, embanking, blasting, breaking, scouring, sawing, felling, reaping, mowing, picking, sifting, and threshing was done by sheer muscular effort, day in, day out.¹

Prominent among the unskilled were the *navvies* and agricultural laborers. The navvies did the physical work in building the railroads, cutting across hills, tunneling through mountains, and moving enormous amounts of earth and stone. They earned at best £1 per week as well as the reputation of being the roughest and most unruly of all workers, working, drinking, and fighting in prodigious measure. Agricultural laborers like all the unskilled were nonunionized and unable to protect their wages, and they remained the largest single occupational group even in the 1850s, as well as the worst paid. A male agricultural laborer earned on average ten shillings a week for very long hours of hard work in all weather. Sometimes the farm laborer also had a *tied cottage* provided by the farmer as part of his wage, or sometimes a patch of ground to raise vegetables or a pig. In most cases, the life was without variety, physically harsh, and psychologically stultifying. The agricultural laborer, wrote one journalist, “has grown up, and gone to service; and there he is, as simple, as ignorant, and as laborious a creature as one of the wagon-horses he drives.”

Domestic service was another major occupation for the unskilled. Because of the demand for servants generated by the middle class, it was a rapidly growing industry, the second largest occupational group, and by far

¹Harrison, *The Early Victorians, 1832–51*, 35

the largest for women. About 40 percent of all women in Victorian Britain were employed (not counting unpaid labor, which was the lot of most wives and mothers), and a majority of these were domestic servants: scullery girls, housemaids, nursemaids, cooks, and housekeepers. Only about one-tenth of all servants were males. Because of their isolation, their direct subordination to their employers, and their conditions of employment, domestic servants were the least class conscious of workers. Most domestics *lived in*—that is, they lived in the cellars and attics of the homes they worked in. Where a number of servants were employed, a strict hierarchy prevailed, with the housekeeper and butler at the top and the scullery girls and chambermaids standing in awe at the bottom. The work for most was hard and tedious. The domestics tended the fires, lit the lamps, carried the water, cooked the meals, washed the dishes, cleaned the clothes, and emptied the slops (flush toilets not being common until the 1850s) in middle- or upper-class homes. A butler might make as much as £50 a year, a housemaid £10 to £15, and all received bed and board as well. Employer and employee alike regarded domestic service at all but the highest levels as menial. One middle-class advice manual revealed the accepted upper-class attitude toward servants:

It is better in addressing [servants] to use a higher key of voice, and not to suffer it to fall at the end of a sentence. . . . The perfection in manners in this particular is to indicate by your language that the performance is a favour, and by your tone that it is a matter of course.

Given such a wide variety of occupations and incomes, it is not easy to generalize about the working-class (or working classes') lifestyle in the first half of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, some aspects of life were common to most workers. First, in the early 1800s, as in all of the past, hard work was the lot of everyone in the working class—men and women alike—except beggars, criminals, and vagrants. Children went to work at age eight or nine and became fully employable as adults at fourteen or fifteen. Everyone worked until illness or death intervened.

Second, almost all working people faced poverty at some point in their lives. Even for the better-off laboring people, much work was seasonal or part-time. Bouts of unemployment were common, and the highest wages did not allow any margin for families to save for illness and old age. Newly married couples could expect hard times when their children were too young to contribute to the family income. At age fifty, all working people could look forward to a time of declining employment and earnings and of increasing privation.

Third, education was hard to come by through the 1860s. Economic need often forced working-class parents to send children to work rather than to school. Working-class educational options were few: some private, fee-supported schools, mostly of questionable quality, set up by individual teachers; a few old charity and endowed schools; a slowly growing number of factory schools set up by philanthropic industrial captains; and above all, Sunday schools (which taught reading). By the 1850s, three-fourths of all children attended Sunday school at some point in their lives—but probably half of all British children attended no school (other than Sunday school), and of those who did, few attended for more than two or three years. Scarcely any attended past age eleven. The haphazard nature of working-class schooling was the product, in part, of upper-class attitudes. Many in the upper classes argued that schooling for working people only contributed to discontent and agitation. One scientist declared in 1807:

However specious in theory the project might be of giving education to the labouring classes of the poor, it would in effect be prejudicial to their morals and happiness: it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants to agriculture and other laborious employments to which their rank in society had destined them . . . [and] it would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books and publications against Christianity.

Slowly, however, this prejudice against working-class schooling began to diminish. Educational reformers included both utilitarians, who promoted the increase of knowledge—the *march of mind*—and evangelicals, who regarded the ability to read the Bible as essential. Both regarded education as a means of making the poor more politically docile, less vice-ridden, and more efficient. Evangelicals had the greatest impact on British working-class education. In 1808, Nonconformists founded the British and Foreign School Society to establish schools for working-class children. Alarmed, evangelicals within the Church of England set up a rival organization, the National Society, three years later. Both societies adopted the *monitorial system*, invented simultaneously by Joseph Lancaster and Andrew Bell. Economical to the extreme, the system used older children to teach the younger ones; hence, one adult teacher might be in charge of over two hundred pupils. Although not the most effective pedagogical system, it did bring schooling to the masses. When, in 1833, the government took its first step toward state provision for public education, it did so by granting the two societies £20,000. By 1850 the societies' grant amount had grown by 1,000 percent. Unfortunately, the rivalry between Anglicans and Nonconformists

led to a great deal of sectarian squabbling over education and in many ways limited the state's role in providing and regulating schools.

Under the circumstances, it was remarkable that the literacy rate grew at all; yet it did. The early urban environment was destructive of literacy, just as it was of life expectancy. Nevertheless, the literacy rate by the 1840s probably rose to include two-thirds of all men and one-half of women. Almost all artisans were literate at a fairly high level. Most others who were literate probably could read at only an elementary level; they could sound out a newspaper headline or billboard, or perhaps read a simplified story. Clearly, the British working people were beginning their long march from an oral to a literate culture, but they were as yet not far along the road.

The upper classes in the early nineteenth century tried to take advantage of what literacy there was both by restricting the reading matter available to the working class and by flooding them with cheap literature designed to entertain them and to make them reliable, sober, and moralistic. Generally speaking, the British state did not resort to censorship to control reading materials, though it did prosecute some radicals for blasphemy and sedition. The main instruments of control were a tax of four pence on each newspaper sheet and taxes on printed advertising. These made newspapers much too expensive for working men. William Cobbett got around these heavy *taxes on knowledge* by publishing his *Political Register* as a pamphlet; however, the taxes remained a significant obstacle until they were repealed in 1854–55.

Meanwhile, the upper classes made respectable reading widely available. The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge published tracts, pamphlets, and penny magazines to evangelize the poor. Middle-class businessmen established mechanics institutes in the industrial cities to offer useful knowledge and lessons in self-help to workers. The utilitarians in the 1820s founded the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge to promote the march of mind. On the whole, such efforts to indoctrinate working people did not succeed, mainly because the upper classes in their writings failed to show a sympathetic understanding of working-class problems. Working-class men and women preferred their own commercialized literature to the cheap moralistic tracts produced for them by the upper classes. As Professor R. K. Webb has written, the poor preferred “to hammer out their own society, their own culture.”²

²Webb, *The British Working Class Reader, 1790–1848*, 162.

It is extremely difficult to say how religion fit into this working-class culture. Clearly, the evangelical revival stopped the decline in religious affiliation that was so characteristic of the eighteenth century, and Methodism (particularly Primitive Methodism) won a strong hold on working people, especially the artisanal ranks. The Church of England was unable (or unwilling) to keep up with the growth of the urban working-class population, for it was simply too bound up with the landed social orders. Only the Nonconformist denominations and Roman Catholicism grew faster than the population itself. In 1840, probably 60 percent of all Nonconformists were from the working class, as were nearly all the Catholics, who were by then largely Irish immigrants. But even Nonconformity had little luck in attracting semiskilled or unskilled urban laborers. Nonconformity could express the aspirations of fairly well-off and literate skilled workers; it gave them a measure of community and a legitimate means of rejecting traditional society. Yet it had little appeal for workers of no independence or hope. Of the half of the adult British populace who attended no church at all in 1851, nearly all were of the working class.

The churches' campaign against traditional popular pastimes and for the spread of *rational recreation* no doubt alienated some of these workers. Evangelicals (and middle-class people in general) strove to put down fairs, animal baiting, and cock fighting on the grounds that such activities encouraged immoral and irrational behavior. Their attempts to replace these popular recreations with much more sober and "improving" activities such as cricket, choral groups, and brass bands did not always meet with a warm welcome in working-class communities.

The evangelical war on drink struck most aggressively at the emerging working-class culture. The consumption of alcohol, especially beer, was a principal feature of working-class life, and in the cities the pub and the beerhouse were central institutions of working-class districts. The pubs offered a warm and attractive alternative to cold and dismal working-class homes; moreover, alcohol was "the quickest way out of Manchester." Working-class families frequently spent a third of their incomes on drink. In the 1870s beer consumption alone amounted to thirty-four gallons per person per year. Evangelical temperance reformers campaigned against drink, insisting that it was the main social problem of the day. They had some success in establishing temperance clubs and recruiting working-class teetotalers, and in some places they succeeded in polarizing the populace into *church* and *pub* camps. Pubs, however, remained the centers of working-class leisure,

providing relaxation, conviviality, handy meeting rooms, and diversions such as pub sports, gambling, and popular entertainment.

Finally, the working-class style of life included a variety of attempts to preserve and reconstruct *community*—a pattern of face-to-face relations and mutual support among people with similar interests and experiences. One way was for families to maintain their integrity and their connection with kin-groups, even in the move from the country to the city. As village communities were broken down, families sought with limited success to rent housing near each other in town, to find employment for each other, and to lend and borrow in seasons of financial trouble.

Another way was to form trade unions. Trade combinations had originated in the early eighteenth century and proliferated during the Triple Revolution, but only among artisans and only on the local level. Many cotton spinners (again, on the local level), the first factory workers to organize, had formed unions by 1815. Though formally outlawed by the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800, trade unions continued to spread among skilled workers as they acted to protect their wages and status from technological change and dishonorable labor. Sometimes, as we have seen in chapter 10, union activity alternated with Luddism. The unions' struggle to repeal the Combination Laws and to form national organizations we will explore in chapter 14. Suffice it to say here that unions, though they included a very small proportion of the whole working population and almost always excluded women, did offer an expression and a support for artisans' sense of community.

The *friendly societies* such as the Foresters and the Oddfellows also promoted the artisans' sense of community. These mutual-aid clubs, some of which also had trade union functions, collected weekly dues from the members and in return gave sickness and burial benefits. A workingman typically contributed a few pennies a week to buy insurance against pauperdom. As early as 1803, there were some 9,600 friendly societies with 700,000 members; by 1872, there were more than 32,000 societies with more than 4 million members. True, the friendly societies taught to the working class the bourgeois lessons of prudence and self-help, but they also offered working men and women opportunities for conviviality and belonging through their ceremonies and monthly meetings. This was an important prop to community in the otherwise atomizing urban environment.

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Chapter 14

Politics and the State, 1815–1850

The structure of British politics and the nature of the state were remade during the first half of the nineteenth century. A wider franchise, a more equal representation of the people, and a more efficient government service were the results. These developments have given to the period labels such as the Age of Improvement and the Age of Progress. Improvements did not, however, come about by the steady unfolding of a progressive consensus. Instead, the process of change was a matter of conflict and compromise among the three social classes into which British society was hardening.

This is not to say that every issue that arose within the world of parliamentary politics can be understood in terms of class analysis, for Parliament remained largely in the hands of the landed elite. But if *politics* is construed broadly to include extra-parliamentary movements, then the idea of class conflict alone can make sense of it. In fact, political conflict helped form class consciousness. Power was at stake: both the middle class and the emerging working class wanted to remake the political structure and formulate the state agenda according to their own interests, whereas the landed class sought to retain its political control. The conflict among the classes brought Britain repeatedly to the brink of chaos, and as late as 1848 it was not clear that the nation would successfully address its social and political problems without revolution.

THE STRUCTURE OF POLITICS AND THE SCOPE OF THE STATE IN 1815

The oligarchical constitution remained almost intact in 1815. Despite the waves of war and social change that threatened to engulf the country, Parliament remained an exclusive gathering of property owners returned to Westminster by inheritance and a tiny electorate. The House of Lords consisted of titled nobility—approximately three hundred great landlords, and only men of wealth and leisure could afford to sit in the House of Commons: all MPs had to meet a steep property qualification, and most faced the

expense of elections and the cost of maintaining themselves in London during the parliamentary *season*. Most MPs were landowners, though very rich businessmen could sometimes “buy” a small borough seat, and talented intellectuals occasionally earned nomination by borough patrons. Defenders of the unreformed constitution saw these features of the political structure as advantages: “It is the very absence of symmetry in our elective franchises which admits of the introduction to this House of classes so various.” As one might expect, the cabinets drawn from such a Parliament were predominantly aristocratic.

The electorate for the House of Commons was very small and irrationally defined. Only in the counties, where *forty-shilling freeholders* had the vote, was there any regularity. Because many of these freeholders were in fact tenant farmers, they were subject to the influence of their landlords, and because county electoral contests were rare, the freeholder electorate exercised less independence than one might think. In the boroughs, the electorates varied from all male householders in a few places to owners of a handful of particular properties in others. More than half of the English boroughs had fewer than 300 voters; upward of 250 borough MPs were simply named by great property owners. In all, perhaps 500,000 men in England and Wales had the vote—about 1 in 42 of the total population. An even smaller proportion in Scotland and Ireland could vote. Moreover, given the ancient and obsolete distribution of seats, most of the new industrial towns went without representation, whereas a patch of turf like Old Sarum returned two members.

One important set of changes had occurred: the political influence of the Crown had declined since the 1780s. During the war against the French Revolution, stricter parliamentary controls over government contracts, revenues, appropriations, and accounting had eroded the Crown’s ability to buy support during elections. Only the right to distribute honors such as knighthoods and peerages remained unaltered, but there were not enough honors for this to be a politically important privilege. The decline of the power of the Crown entailed a decline in the power of the executive over the House of Commons. Increasingly, cabinets regarded themselves as responsible to Parliament and not to the monarch, but they had little power with which to construct and maintain a majority.

Parliament, therefore, remained an unrepresentative institution. The most significant level of government in the ordinary lives of the people was local, and local government was still in the hands of wealthy landowners and municipal oligarchies. The role of the central government remained con-

financed to external affairs, taxation, and public order despite the onset of urgent, nationwide social problems. The British state was, compared to those in France, Prussia, or Russia, small and passive. As late as the 1820s, there were fewer than thirty thousand government employees, most of whom worked in the tax-collecting departments. The Home Office had a staff of seventeen and the Colonial Office only fourteen. Moreover, these public officials were often incompetent, chosen as they were for their connections rather than their ability.

POLITICAL REFORM, 1815–1835

This was a structure of politics and government calculated to drive both middle class and working class to distraction. Middle-class men resented their exclusion from local and national government, and they disliked the unsystematic and inefficient character of the legal system, government service, and parliamentary structure. For their part, working-class activists found the government unresponsive to the needs of the common people because it neither protected customary ways of life nor defended standards of living. Both sets of reformers aimed to make the government more responsible to the people. Differing class interests, however, made it difficult for reformers to work together and so diminished their effectiveness.

Reform-minded people in addition faced the huge problem of how to move an unreformed Parliament to reform itself as well as the other institutions of government. A few radicals believed that revolution was the only way; hence, there was an elusive and fragmentary revolutionary impulse that protruded at critical moments right down to 1848. Most reformers, however, including nearly all those from the middle class, refused to countenance violence. For them, persuasion and pressure by a mobilized *public opinion*, expressed mainly by newspapers, petitions, and pressure groups, were the only acceptable tactics.

Not all members of the landed elite stood opposed to any change to the existing order. The call for administrative reform attracted significant support from both Whigs and Tories. Whigs such as Sir Samuel Romilly and Sir James Mackintosh joined Benthamites and Tory humanitarians in working for rationalization of the legal code. They focused on the vast number of crimes punishable by death because they wanted to make the law less savage and more efficient. Tories of the Pittite tradition serving in Lord Liverpool's ministry (1812–27) were open to this type of liberalizing influence. In particular, the Home secretary, Sir Robert Peel (son of a wealthy textile

manufacturer), brought to his office a powerful impulse toward high-minded administrative professionalism. Peel (1788–1850) consolidated the criminal code, abolished fees and perquisites for judges, began the reform of prisons, drastically cut the number of criminal offenses, and in 1829 established the London police—the first professional police force in Britain (nicknamed “bobbies” because of Peel’s first name).

Administrative reform was one thing, however, and political reform was another. The Tories, including Liverpool, Peel, and the hero of Waterloo—the duke of Wellington—insisted that the British Parliament provided the best government in the world. They believed that Parliament represented all the legitimate interests of the country; that it gave due weight to property owners, who were the most stable and wisest segment of the population; and that political reform would lead to “unmanly” subservience of Parliament to an irresponsible electorate that was bent on the pillaging of property.

Advocacy of political reform from within the elite was left to the Foxite Whigs, a small faction remaining from the large parliamentary party of the 1770s and early 1780s. These Whigs were loyal to the memory of Charles James Fox and to the defense of liberty established, they believed, in 1688. Largely excluded from office since 1783, the Foxite Whigs argued that the Crown (and therefore the executive) exerted undue influence over Parliament. Hence, they sought to reduce government patronage even more, as well as to defend civil liberties. They also favored granting full citizenship for Nonconformists and Catholics, on grounds of religious liberty.

In the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the Foxite Whigs gradually took up the cause of parliamentary reform. As they did so, other Whig factions shifted over to the Tory ranks, leaving the Foxites as custodians of the Whig banner. The Foxite motives were threefold: first, having been out of government for more than thirty years, they came to believe that reform was an issue they could ride into office; second, they realized that reform would strengthen the House of Commons against the executive; and third, they thought that moderate reform could alone head off a dangerous alliance between respectable and radical reformers outside Parliament. They feared revolution as much as the Tories, but as one Whig wrote in 1810, they hoped parliamentary reform would “temper” the extra-parliamentary agitation “till it can be guided in safety to the defense, and not to the destruction of our liberties.”

The respectable reformers the Whigs had in mind were those of the middle class. For example, Lord John Russell, a leading Whig, recalled that

what had converted him to reform in the 1820s was his recognition that “the middle class, as compared with the corresponding body in the previous century, had risen in wealth, and intelligence and knowledge, and influence.” Middle-class people wholeheartedly agreed with this assessment, for it was the view put forward by powerful new provincial newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Leeds Mercury*. “Never in any country beneath the sun [wrote Edward Baines of the *Leeds Mercury*] was an order of men more estimable and valuable, more praised and praiseworthy, than the middle class of society in England.” Middle-class Nonconformists thought that they deserved a share of power in local government, and men of property believed that their interests should count in national policy. Middle-class reformers also contended that the long continuation of the war against Napoleon, the Orders in Council (1812), and above all the Corn Law (1815) discriminated against commerce and industry on behalf of the narrow interests of the landlords. Increasingly, middle-class men agreed with Bentham that the individual knew his own interests better than any oligarchy and therefore that a more representative system would ensure that Parliament reflected the views of the people.

Radical reform—that is, universal manhood suffrage—was to most middle-class people out of the question. What they wanted was enfranchisement of responsible and independent males. These could best be chosen by a property qualification. As we have seen, they typically believed that women, like children, were either dependent or irresponsible and consequently not eligible for the vote. But all adult males of substantial property, regardless of their religion, should have the right to vote and to hold office.

The politically active members of the working class, however, tended to favor more extreme proposals harking back to the radicalism of the early 1790s. Leaders of popular radicalism who themselves were not of working-class origins—men like William Cobbett, Sir Francis Burdett, and Major John Cartwright—agitated for the old program of household suffrage (giving the vote to who owned or rented property at a certain value), annual Parliaments, and equal electoral districts. Working men and women typically went further, taking up the cry of universal manhood suffrage, especially when the end of war in 1815 brought severe economic depression. For them, democracy was the prerequisite to protection from the twin evils of depression and industrial exploitation.

The popular reform movement, therefore, was one part of a broad range of working-class responses to hard times. Luddism and agrarian rioting

were, as we have seen, widespread in 1811–12 and again in 1816. Trade unions proliferated as artisans organized to protect their standards of living and control over their crafts. Union growth was especially rapid after the Combination Laws were repealed in 1824. There were even attempts to form national unions in the late 1820s and early 1830s. Working people also resorted to petitions to Parliament, addresses to magistrates, and strikes against employers, all of which were ominously widespread between 1810 and 1830. Workers tended to oscillate between one or another of these activities and the parliamentary reform agitation, depending on the immediate circumstances.

Socialist ideas and organizations also began to spread among literate workers between 1815 and 1830. Here the unifying concept was simply that capitalism itself caused the hardships of the working class. Utopian industrialist Robert Owen (1771–1858), for instance, put forward the view that cooperation ought to replace competition, for competition among workers forced wages down and kept consumption unnaturally low. Owen believed that human nature was malleable and that institutional change could nurture cooperative instincts. Thus, he advocated the establishment of utopian cooperative communities. Many Owenites went so far as to advocate ending patriarchal power in marriage and votes for women. Other socialists, such as Thomas Hodgskin, emphasized that labor is the source of all value and therefore that profit is unearned and unjustifiable.

All of these popular responses to economic and social hardship tended to raise and spread class consciousness among working people, as did the oppressive reaction of the authorities. The repeal of the Combination Laws had been expected to reduce trade union activity, but when it did not, the government in 1825 imposed strong sanctions against union activities that could be seen as restraining trade. Moreover, as six agricultural laborers in Dorset (the Tolpuddle martyrs) were to discover in 1833, the government could use old statutes forbidding the taking of oaths in its battle against unionization. The government also waged war against the *unstamped* popular press in the 1830s. Parliament ignored popular petitions and the government broke up mass meetings, sometimes by force. In 1819, for instance, the local magistrates and yeomanry scattered a peaceful gathering of about sixty thousand people in St. Peter's Fields, Manchester. In this infamous Peterloo Massacre, eleven people were killed, and later that same year Parliament passed the Six Acts to reinforce magistrates against public meetings and to strengthen the laws against unstamped publications.

These efforts at repression only increased the number of working people who associated their troubles with the belief that the government was corrupt. This tradition, dating back to the old Tory and country Whig ideology of the early 1700s, was the key to the popular reform movement. Working people who suffered from industrial and demographic change and from downturns in the business cycle concluded that their difficulties arose because the oligarchy was inefficient and extravagant. On this point, middle-class and working-class radicals could agree, at least in certain localities. In Birmingham and Sheffield, for example, small workshops with close relations between masters and working-class people formed the main pattern in manufacturing. There, political cooperation between middle-class and working-class activists was possible. In cotton towns such as Manchester and Leeds, however, where great spinning mills set the pattern for industrial relations, the clash of middle-class and working-class interests made political cooperation impossible.

In any case, pressure on the old constitution was intense by the latter 1820s. The first part of the old system to crumble under the stress was the Anglican monopoly. By 1827, most politicians agreed that the Test and Corporation Acts were of symbolic value only. The Whigs were united in favor of repealing them, and Nonconformist pressure from outside Parliament was very strong. The Tory government (now led by Wellington, who cared little about religion) saw no reason to resist. Parliament in 1828 abolished the acts with little dispute.

Giving full political rights to Roman Catholics was more controversial. Many Protestants equated the admission of Catholics to Parliament and other high office with rejection of the very principles of the Reformation and the settlement of 1688–89. The Whigs favored emancipation of Catholics, but public opinion remained hotly anti-Catholic. In retrospect, it seems clear that, if England, Wales, and Scotland alone had been consulted, then Catholics would not have received emancipation until much later in the century. But, as chapter 15 will show, Ireland was intensely concerned with the issue. Irish Catholics, mobilized by a nationalist leader of unparalleled oratorical power, Daniel O’Connell, fought hard for emancipation. O’Connell, himself a Catholic, won a by-election in 1828 and thereby presented the Wellington government with a stark choice between Catholic emancipation or civil war in Ireland. Wellington and Peel, both of them hard-headed realists, opted for Catholic emancipation, and it was passed in 1829.

Catholic emancipation, so innocuous to the English-speaking world of the twenty-first century, spelled the end of the Tory government, and thus indirectly it made parliamentary reform immediately possible. Ultra-Protestant Tories did not forgive Wellington and Peel for “betraying” Anglican interests and withdrew their support from the Tory government. A general election in 1830, necessitated by the death of King George IV, coincided with news of fresh revolution in France. Discussions of reform intensified. At the same time, another downturn in the economy and a sharp increase in food prices roused public agitation. Finally, in November 1830, the beleaguered Tory government resigned, and a successor was formed by the Whig Lord Grey (1764–1845). This grand Foxite earl had long believed in parliamentary reform, on the grounds that the antiquated constitutional machinery had to be brought into line with new economic and social realities if aristocratic rule, which he cherished, was to be saved.

In the circumstances of 1830–31, Grey believed that the extra-parliamentary reform movement was dangerous and could be pacified only by passage of a substantial measure. He and his allies thought that the number of county members, widely regarded as independent and incorruptible, had to be enlarged; the new towns had to be given representation; pocket boroughs had to be abolished; and a uniform borough franchise had to replace all the existing irregular franchises. By this combination of provisions, the middle class would be co-opted, Parliament strengthened, and landed power ultimately preserved. As Grey put it, the middle class had become the “real and efficient mass of public opinion . . . without whom the power of the gentry is nothing.”

The bill proposed in 1831 by Grey’s ministry was therefore bolder than most people had expected. It succeeded in attracting the support of middle-class reformers and even some of the popular radicals. Some working-class democrats argued that the reform bill was a cruel disappointment because it offered nothing to working men; however, others saw it as a stepping stone to further reform. This debate within working-class circles was fierce during the spring and summer of 1831, but when the House of Lords rejected the bill in October 1831, radical opinion tended to consolidate behind it. There were spontaneous outbreaks of violence in a number of towns. Even some middle-class radicals, including Benthamites such as James Mill and his friend, the radical tailor Francis Place, seemed to countenance armed rebellion. The threat of revolution was probably exaggerated in aristocratic minds, but it was decisive. Wellington was unable to form an alternative government to Grey’s, so King William IV had to promise Grey

to create enough pro-reform peers to pass the bill through the upper house. The Lords preferred even reform to dilution of their ranks and therefore gave way. The reform bill became law in June 1832: the Great Reform Act.

To complete the account of constitutional reform, it is necessary to jump ahead to 1835, when the Municipal Corporations Act was passed. This act did at the local level what the Reform Act of 1832 did at the national level: it opened the corridors of power to middle-class men, including above all the Nonconformists. The Municipal Corporations Act (and a similar one for Scotland) substituted a structure of broadly elected town councils for the oligarchical borough corporations. The counties continued to be ruled by appointed officials, mainly drawn from the gentry, but the towns were now in the hands of the business and professional people who swarmed into local office and occupied themselves with making municipal bureaucracies and services more businesslike and efficient. Eventually, their work would have a great effect on the quality of life in the towns.

THE STRUCTURE OF POLITICS AFTER 1832

The structure of politics established by the Reform Act of 1832 (and by similar separate acts for Scotland and Ireland) changed many political practices, but it also left much of the old system in place. The Irish Reform Act retained a very high property qualification established by the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829. In England, Wales, and Scotland, however, the Reform Acts made essentially two types of changes. First, they abolished many tiny *rotten* boroughs and redistributed those seats to the more populous constituencies, mainly the industrial towns. In England and Wales, for instance, eighty-six boroughs lost all or half their seats, and forty-two new boroughs were created. Second, the acts imposed a uniform property qualification for the vote in all boroughs: any male occupying a household worth £10 a year. In the counties the 40-shilling freehold franchise was kept, but farmers who held tenancies worth £50 a year were added as a sop to the landowners, who presumably would be able to browbeat them. Altogether about eight hundred thousand men had the vote after 1832—about a 60-percent increase, though still only about one in thirty of the population (or one-seventh of adult males).

The reforms of 1832 therefore did not create a democracy. Women still could not vote. A number of boroughs still had fewer than two hundred voters, and perhaps sixty more boroughs were small enough to be in the pocket of a big proprietor. The landlords still influenced the way that their tenants

voted in the counties. Corruption, in the form of bribery or treating voters to lavish food and drink, remained the style in many constituencies. The £10 household franchise was meant to be a rough-and-ready means of including the middle class while excluding the working class, and it accomplished its purpose fairly well. Its precise effect varied from borough to borough because economic conditions and pay rates differed from one place to another, but only in a few places did the working-class voters amount to a majority of the electorate. In most big cities such as Manchester, Birmingham, and Leeds, workers composed no more than 10 to 20 percent of the voters.

In such conditions, deference remained a major factor in determining how a vote was cast. Tenants tended to vote with their landlords, tradesmen with their patrons, and in some cases, industrial workers with their factory owners, especially where the masters adopted paternalist attitudes toward their men. Nor was Parliament flooded with businessmen. The hold of the landed elite was only slowly eroded, and not until the 1880s did the number of middle-class MPs approach a majority. Industrial and commercial men, as we will see, made their weight felt in other ways.

Nevertheless, the structural changes worked by the 1832 reforms were extremely important. By both the terms of the acts and the process by which they were passed, the balance in the constitution was shifted toward the House of Commons, which was now clearly attached to public opinion. In the boroughs, public opinion spoke through the voice of middle-class newspapers, journals, and pressure groups. Further, the decline of the influence of the Crown meant that governments had less ability than before to command a majority in the House of Commons. If organized, a majority could determine who would form the government. Inevitably, then, stronger party groupings emerged in Parliament, and in terms of enabling a ministry to get its work done, the parties took the place of patronage.

The parties were also strengthened outside Parliament as an unintended consequence of the 1832 reforms. The Reform Acts established a system of voter registration for the first time, and the constituency registers became the key to electoral success. Both Whigs and Tories (or Liberals and Conservatives, as they became) found that they had to employ professionals, usually solicitors, to maximize their own registrations and minimize their opponents'. Local party organizations sprang up to defend party electoral interests. In London, two great political clubs were founded to coordinate national electoral activities: the Carlton Club (1832) for the Tories and the



Sir Robert Peel, by H. W Pickersgill. Peel was Conservative prime minister in 1835 and from 1841 to 1846. The model of public spirit and probity, Peel carried repeal of the Corn Law in 1846.

Reform Club (1836) for the Whigs and other reformers. The club secretaries pushed local organizations into action and suggested parliamentary candidates to them. Thus, extra-parliamentary party organizations were established for the first time in Britain; although they could not dictate policy to the MPs, who cherished their independence, they formed important bridges between the voters and their representatives.

Meanwhile, the fluid alignments of parliamentary politicians called Tories and Whigs began to coalesce into firmer, more broad-based groupings called Conservatives and Liberals. The new alignments reflected the widespread sense among active politicians that because of the new political structures the policies and institutions of society would be questioned in a direct and forceful way. Catholic emancipation and the reforms of 1832 had unsettled the Tory parliamentary faction, and only the clear ascendancy of Sir Robert Peel pulled conservatively minded people together. Peel taught the Tories that they could live with the reformed constitution. Recognizing the renovative tendencies of the times, Peel committed himself to cautious reform of the central institutions of the state so as to save them. In his famous Tamworth Manifesto of 1834, Peel called for a “careful review of institutions, civil and ecclesiastical” aiming at “the correction of proved abuses and the redress of real grievances.” By then, Peel was acknowledged

as the leader of a Conservative party. In 1841 he became prime minister after a general election, the first time that the electorate had turned out one government and installed another.

The touchstones of the early Victorian Conservatives were defense of agricultural interests and defense of the Church of England. The Whigs were as firmly rooted in the land as the Tories, but in the 1830s landlords and farmers alike drifted to the Conservative party. They did so because they realized that the Whigs were allied with their enemies—middle-class businessmen and radical anti-aristocrats. Preservation of the Corn Law of 1815 became a Conservative preoccupation. As for the Church of England, most Conservatives opposed reform of the institution itself even if they accepted removal of the civil disabilities of non-churchmen. They feared that the reformed Parliament, now open to Catholics and Nonconformists, would destroy the Church. As W. E. Gladstone, then a brilliant young Conservative orator, declared in 1836, “The doctrine and the system of the Establishment contain and exhibit the truth in its purest and most effective form.” Once again it was the pragmatic Peel who in the 1830s dragged the Conservatives, kicking and grumbling all the way, to accept administrative reform of the Church, on grounds that, if they did not reform it, the radicals would.

The evolution of the Liberal party was more complicated. In the 1830s and 1840s, the word *liberal* came to be generally used to refer to an alliance of Whigs, “philosophic radicals” (that is, Benthamites) and other radical reformers, and Daniel O’Connell’s Irish faction. There was no one individual around whom they could rally: Grey was too old; his successor, Lord Melbourne (prime minister in 1834 and 1835–41), was a kindly friend and mentor to the young Queen Victoria, but lacked energy and force; and John Russell (prime minister from 1846 to 1852) showed fiery eloquence, but proved ineffective both as administrator and as party leader. Nevertheless, the crystallization of the Conservatives around Peel forced the Whigs, radicals, and Irish MPs to compromise their differences. They had to ally in order to maintain power and to move on with the reforms that, to varying degrees, they desired. By the 1840s, ordinary political language referred to this often unhappy alliance of reformers as the Liberal party, although the party was not founded in the formal sense until 1859.

What did the Liberals stand for? It is convenient to start with the radicals because they were the group most eager to take the initiative. The radical group included not only Benthamite intellectuals like the young John Stuart Mill (1806–73), but also militant Nonconformists like Edward Miall

(1809–81). Whether Benthamites or Nonconformists, these middle-class radicals wanted to remake the institutions of state and church to conform to the principles of individualism and competition. Aristocratic influence, they believed, had to go. Hence, they favored further extension of the franchise, the secret ballot, and shorter Parliaments, all of which would make Parliament more directly representative of the constituencies. They wanted to abolish the Corn Law, which, they believed, gave preference to the agricultural interest over industry and commerce. Furthermore, they wanted to restrict the privileges of the Church of England. Many wished to disestablish it altogether, for which purpose they formed in 1844 a pressure group called the Anti-State Church Association (later renamed the Liberation Society). In the meantime, radicals sought to pare away the excessive wealth of the Church, to abolish compulsory church rates (local taxes), to allow Nonconformists to have their own rites for marriage and burials, and to open Oxford and Cambridge to dissenters.

The Whigs displayed a more diffuse range of policies because they were members of a particular group of aristocratic families rather than ideologues. Generally speaking, they regarded 1832 as final in constitutional reform, but they favored alteration of the Church, both to conciliate middle-class Nonconformist opinion and to make the Church less vulnerable to extremists who wished to disestablish it. Because the Whigs only gradually took up the cause of repealing the Corn Law, the Church issue was what most clearly distinguished them from the Tories. In 1832, the Whig government appointed an ecclesiastical commission to investigate the wealth of the Church, the anomalies in clerical salaries, and the long-standing problems of pluralism and nonresidence (clergymen holding more than one position and so frequently not residing in the parish for which they were responsible). In 1833, the Whigs abolished ten bishoprics of the Anglican Church of Ireland, an egregiously top-heavy institution. In 1836, they sponsored legislation that legalized Nonconformist marriages and set up state (rather than church) registration of births, deaths, and marriages.

The Conservatives and Liberals of early Victorian Britain were not class parties in any rigorous sense. Both of them had aristocratic, middle-class, and even to some extent working-class elements. Yet the center of gravity in the social composition of the one differed from that of the other. The Conservatives increasingly spoke for landed Anglican England, whereas the Liberals voiced the outlook of Nonconformist business and commercial men and of Scottish and Irish interests. Such differences did not emerge in connection with every issue, and they would be blurred when Peel accepted

repeal of the Corn Law in 1846, but the centrality of religion to the process of class formation in Britain produced a significant degree of class orientation in the two political parties even by mid-century.

THE CONDITION OF ENGLAND QUESTION AND THE GROWTH OF THE STATE, 1832–1850

Whatever their differences, Conservatives and Liberals were men of property and shared a broad consensus about the framework of the society and the constitution. Thus, on many issues that came before them, MPs did not divide along party lines. Chief among these nonparty issues was the so-called Condition of England Question (although it related to conditions in Wales, Scotland, and Ireland as well). As we saw in the last chapter, the appalling slums of Manchester and other industrial cities bore witness to the massive economic and social problems generated by demographic, industrial, and urban change.

Faced with such problems, members of both parties felt conflicting impulses. Liberals generally believed in *laissez-faire*, the notion that the market economy was self-regulating and would, if left alone, automatically reach maximum production and full employment—and so enable individuals to take action to improve their own conditions, without any governmental action or interference. Many Liberals, however, were also utilitarians who believed that the government should intervene in society in order to produce the greatest happiness of the greatest number; hence, they admired “scientific” analysis of social problems and expert administration, and recognized that some issues could not be resolved by individual action. Unlike the Liberals, Conservatives tended to remain committed to the paternalist ideal of a communal social order in which the powerful take care of the powerless and so they often opposed *laissez-faire*. But because they were also devoted to local interests and the rights of property, they mistrusted centralization and feared an active government. Both parties were therefore pulled in both directions: for and against state intervention in society and economy. The political results were contradictory and complex. Different solutions to the condition of England problem reflected different mixes of these fundamental attitudes, as an examination of the new Poor Law, factory reforms, and public health legislation reveals.

The first major social issue that Parliament addressed after 1832 was the Poor Law. The existing Poor Law, which dated back to the Elizabethan period, had become by the 1800s a ramshackle system. Worse yet, it was

expensive. In 1831–32, the Poor Law cost £7 million. Yet it did not ensure social peace, as the Swing Riots of 1830 showed. By then, the propertied classes agreed that the Poor Law must be reformed, and the Whigs appointed a royal commission to investigate in 1832.

The Poor Law Commission reported in 1834 and issued a classic monument of middle-class ideology. The commission was dominated by political economists—most notably, Edwin Chadwick (1800–90), the first great civil servant in British history and an embodiment of Benthamite relentlessness, narrowness, and intolerance. It concluded that the Poor Law itself created poverty by teaching the laboring poor to depend on *outdoor relief*—that is, financial assistance given outside the workhouses. As one witness said, “The system of allowances is most mischievous and ruinous, and till it is abandoned the spirit of industry can never be revived.” The able-bodied poor should be forced off the relief rolls and those who could not support themselves and their families forced into the workhouse, where conditions should be miserable—“less eligible” than those of the lowest paying job in the locality. Hence, people who really could work would be driven to do so. A central board would set out and implement the new regulations.

The Poor Law was amended along these lines in 1834, with very little opposition. Paradoxically, though enacted on *laissez-faire* principles, the new Poor Law resulted in the growth of central government. Under the old Poor Law, the initiative had rested with local authorities, but now the secretary to the new Poor Law Board—Chadwick himself—badgered local Poor Law unions incessantly to build workhouses and halt all outdoor relief. Poor Law inspectors, employed by the state, enforced the new law. Yet, as promised, the new system did cut costs: by 1840, Poor Law expenditure was down to £4.6 million a year.

Although middle- and upper-class ratepayers thus had reason to welcome the new Poor Law, workers responded in anger. To them the Poor Law and its *workhouse test* symbolized the heartlessness of the new industrial order and the shattering of communal ties. Moreover, in the industrial North, where large numbers were unemployed during periods of recession, the workhouses simply could not cope, for the new Poor Law had been based on the false theory that the able-bodied could always find work.

Although liberal ideology and the desire to cut costs motivated the new Poor Law, a curious combination of trade union radicalism and paternalist humanitarianism drove forward factory reform legislation. Workers themselves organized in unions such as the Manchester Cotton Spinners, led by John Doherty, and Conservative Evangelical elites such as Richard Oastler

and Michael Sadler demanded that the state address the new industrial order. The trade unions wanted a reduction of hours of labor in the factories in order to ease the hardship of factory work and create opportunities for unemployed adult men. The Evangelical reformers were especially moved by child labor in the factories. In 1830, Oastler wrote of “thousands of little children . . . sacrificed at the shrine of avarice, without even the solace of the Negro slave.” The general hope of all factory reformers was to restrict the working day of children to ten hours, on the assumption that this would cause adult labor to be restricted as well.

The dispute over the proposed ten-hours policy was heated. Paternalist Conservatives stood for the restriction as opposed to Whigs, Liberals, and the majority of manufacturers, who argued that restricting child labor constituted unwarranted state interference in the marketplace. Sadler lost his seat in 1832, and parliamentary leadership of the factory reform movement passed to the most remarkable Tory Evangelical of the century, Lord Ashley (later earl of Shaftesbury). The Whigs appointed a commission to study factory reform in 1833; it was led by the ubiquitous Chadwick. In his report, Chadwick refuted many of the humanitarian arguments, but admitted that children were not free agents in the labor market and therefore warranted protection. The resulting Factory Act of 1833 prohibited the employment of children under age nine in textile mills and restricted the hours of all those under eighteen. More importantly, the act established a professional inspectorate to supervise compliance with its regulations.

This inspectorate eventually contributed to further reform. The ten-hours movement continued to agitate inside and outside Parliament, but it had little effect until the factory inspectors uncovered weaknesses in the 1833 act. Their expert testimony, effectively marshaled by Lord Ashley, resulted in additional restrictions of child labor in 1844 and finally in a Ten Hours Act for all textile workers in 1847.

Professional expertise also played a crucial role in focusing the power of the state on the great problem of public health in the industrial towns, the third aspect of the Condition of England Question. In this case, many of the experts were doctors who had firsthand experience with the horrors of cholera and typhus in congested urban areas. Physicians such as Sir James Kay (Manchester) and Southwood Smith (London) based their conclusions on statistical rather than biological evidence, but they were right nevertheless: filth and disease were closely related. Meanwhile, work on the Poor Law Board turned Chadwick's attention to public health, and in 1842 he issued a *Sanitary Report* that shocked its readers and became a bestseller. Sheer

facts had persuaded him that the unsanitary urban environment caused disease, and disease caused poverty and dependence on the Poor Law. Other royal commissions and parliamentary committees in the 1840s drew the same conclusions.

Yet public health legislation was slow in coming. English localist tradition—the belief in the rights and authority of borough governments—stoutly opposed centralization. Moreover, the institutions that provided water, waste removal, and drainage for the towns were private companies, and they fought effectively to protect their rights and profits. Significant action did not come until 1848, when a breakthrough Public Health Act was passed. It established a central Board of Health (headed, of course, by Chadwick) with some power to compel local authorities to undertake sanitary reform. Chadwick, however, alienated many local officials and was dismissed in 1854; four years later, in an apparent victory for localism (and defeat for public health), the Board of Health was disbanded. But the man who in effect succeeded Chadwick, Sir John Simon, was a much more pragmatic and successful administrator. His privy council medical department prepared the ground for effective government intervention, which came in the latter 1860s.

By the 1850s, then, the scope and size of the British state had grown markedly because of utilitarian calls for rational reform, the moral outrage of evangelical and paternalist humanitarianism, and the development of professional expertise. A new pattern in the legislative process emerged: humanitarian reformers brought an issue before Parliament; a royal commission was appointed to gather facts; a law was passed and professional administrators appointed; and thereafter, the professionals provided irresistible impetus for further reform. By 1870, the number of government employees stood at fifty-four thousand. Experts now regulated in varying degrees the Poor Law, the prisons, the railways, and most textile mills; the central government was beginning to take a hand in cleaning up the cities; and the state had become registrar of births, marriages, and deaths as well as regular census taker.

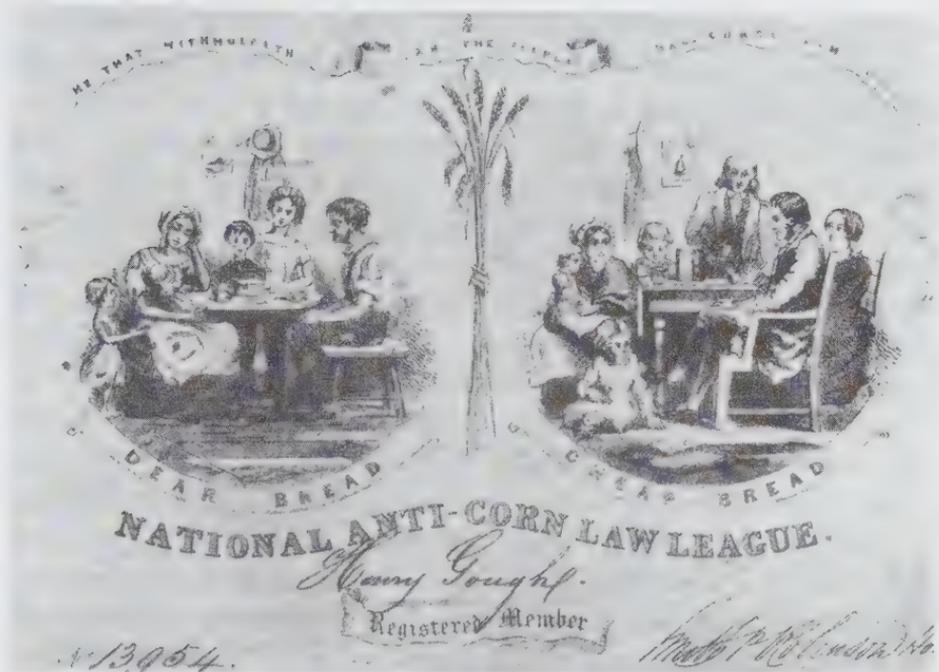
Not only was the state engaged in activities never dreamed of a century earlier, but also the standard of performance was much higher. Professionalism was making a genuine civil service out of government employees. To advance this process, two businesslike administrators, Sir Charles Trevelyan and Sir Stafford Northcote, issued in 1853 a report calling for a unified civil service based on the principles of appointment by open competitive examination and promotion by merit. This was a bitter pill to swallow for those

devoted to aristocratic government, but the scope and complexity of social problems had made the medicine necessary. Civil service exams were introduced in the 1860s, and patronage in most departments ended in 1870. In fact, sons of the aristocracy and gentry continued to monopolize government service, for they had the classical education favored by the examiners. The growth of the British state thus was doubly paradoxical: the state grew during the great era of laissez-faire ideology, and the elite maintained their grip on public office by accepting bourgeois principles of competition and merit.

CLASS POLITICS: THE ANTI-CORN LAW LEAGUE AND THE CHARTIST MOVEMENT

Class conflict, so evident in the passage of the new Reform Act and the new Poor Law, boiled over ominously in two extra-parliamentary movements: the Anti-Corn Law League, the archetype organization of middle-class interests, and Chartism, the first nationwide working-class movement. The Anti-Corn Law League was founded in Manchester in 1838. It gave voice to the middle-class belief in political economy: the efficiency of the free market and the virtues of free trade. The Corn Law of 1815 had been a key event in the awakening of middle-class consciousness. Businessmen recognized that in its intention of keeping grain prices high, the Corn Law was a blatant attempt by the landlords to protect their own interests at the expense of the rest of the nation. The Corn Law, according to the Anti-Corn Law League, kept food prices high and reduced commercial and industrial profits by forcing employers to pay artificially high wages. Even the introduction of a sliding scale on grain duties did not satisfy the captains of industry and trade. In fact, the Corn Law (now modified) failed to keep grain prices up, but that did not mute the drumfire of criticism coming from the business sector. After 1836, when bad harvests drove food prices up and trade went into a slump, middle-class discontent intensified and then found an organizational outlet in the Anti-Corn Law League.

Richard Cobden and John Bright, the leading figures in the Anti-Corn Law agitation exemplified Victorian middle-class ideals. Cobden (1804–65), an Anglican owner of calico mills in Manchester, was a self-made man. He preached even to the working class “the love of independence, the privilege of self-respect, the disdain of being patronised . . . the desire to accumulate, and the ambition to rise.” He believed that state interference in the economy



Dear bread and cheap bread: a membership card of the National Anti-Corn Law League. The elaborate designs served a propagandist purpose when the cards were displayed on a wall or mantelpiece.

only promoted privilege and monopoly, which he despised. Further, he reasoned that free trade would strengthen British farming by exposing it to competition, and if adopted around the world, it would lead nations into specialization of production and networks of trade that would spell international peace. Cobden recognized that persuasion alone would not win Parliament over; the League had to bring pressure on every candidate, regardless of party, and work for the defeat of Corn Law defenders. He thus created the first modern pressure group.

Bright (1811–89), a Quaker industrialist from Rochdale, supplemented Cobden's tactical shrewdness with moral passion. He made the campaign against the Corn Law into a moral crusade and became the symbol of the Nonconformist in politics: bluff, moralistic, and righteous. To such people, the Anti-Corn Law struggle involved much more than economics, for it encompassed a blow at the aristocracy and the Anglican church. As one pro-League newspaper declared in 1841: "The value of tithes and teinds on which they [the Anglican clergy] fatten is vastly enhanced, they know, by the aristocratic restrictions on the food of the community."

The Anti-Corn Law League between 1838 and 1846 held countless meetings; sponsored thousands of tracts, pamphlets, and lectures; and presented many motions in the House of Commons. But it never persuaded a majority to vote for repeal. True, it convinced Peel himself, who as prime minister in 1845 remarked to a colleague after hearing Cobden speak, "You must answer this for I cannot." It was famine in Ireland that brought the Corn Law down. Beginning in 1845, the Irish potato crop failed, and the most terrible famine in modern British history settled on Ireland (see chapter 15). Peel believed that he had no choice but to seek repeal of the Corn Law in 1846 in order to allow cheap food to be imported into Ireland. He and his personal following (the "Peelites") joined the Liberals in overturning the Corn Law. Peel gave credit to Cobden, but Cobden himself admitted that, without the crisis in Ireland, the League would not have succeeded.

Repeal of the Corn Law did not have the consequences either side had anticipated. It neither saved the Irish poor nor undercut the power of the landed class. Nevertheless, it was seen as a great victory for middle-class ideas, though once again enacted by a Parliament of landowners. When stable prosperity blessed Britain in the 1850s and 1860s, free trade got the credit. Britons of the governing classes concluded that free trade was the key to economic success. This would be a difficult lesson to unlearn.

Repeal of the Corn Laws also had unintended—and momentous—parliamentary consequences. Fractured by the repeal debate, the Conservative party split in two. The split became permanent when Conservative M P Benjamin Disraeli, who had ferociously attacked Peel in the contentious repeal debate, ascended into the ranks of the Conservative leadership. The Peelites, a group containing some of the most able administrative talents in the Commons, including the future prime minister W. E. Gladstone, could not forgive Disraeli for his treatment of Peel. Peel himself died in 1850 and the Peelites merged with the Whigs in the Liberal party.

Throughout the long campaign to abolish the Corn Law, the Anti-Corn Law Leaguers asserted that, because the middle and working classes had identical interests, the working class should support the League. But the great majority of politically minded working men and women remained suspicious of the League, which they regarded as the rationalization of middle-class interests. Working-class activists cautioned that, if repeal of the Corn Law did result in cheaper food, then employers would only reduce wages. This argument was particularly powerful in the Chartist movement that emerged in the 1830s. Chartists thus sometimes broke up Anti-Corn Law meetings; what they wanted was political empowerment.

Chartism was the largest mass movement in Victorian history, so large and dramatic that at times it seemed to threaten revolution. It had roots in the popular radicalism of the eighteenth century—the tradition of the moral economy of the crowd and the radical belief in democracy and a free Parliament. The Chartist program varied widely by region and by social group, but most Chartists agreed with the working-class radicals of the 1820s that social problems were caused by governmental failings and that political reform would in some unspecified way lead to radical social and economic change. At the same time, most Chartists were backward-looking in their desire to restore lost independence and community. Hence, Chartism always found its warmest support among artisans. Factory workers in some towns became Chartists, but their activity tended to wax and wane as the economy slumped and boomed. The largest number of Chartists, and the most militant, came from the outworkers, artisans such as handloom weavers, framework knitters, and nail makers who were suffering because they could not compete with dishonorable labor and the factories.

The founding of Chartism had two immediate causes: first, the frustration of working-class radicals with the parliamentary reform of 1832, and second, the popular hatred of the new Poor Law of 1834. While their former middle-class allies were taking up repeal of the Corn Law, working-class radicals continued to work for a broader franchise. At the same time, the anti-Poor Law campaign was very widespread in the North of England, especially in the bad years of 1836–37. Working people thought that the new Poor Law was cruel and degrading, because it forced them to seek relief in “Poor Law Bastilles,” where they had to wear prison-like uniforms, undergo separation of family members, and work at miserable tasks such as stone breaking and bone grinding. In 1839, representatives of popular radicalism and the anti-Poor Law campaign met in London to consider possible courses of action. They wrote up what they called *the Charter*: a manifesto that contained six key demands, known as *the six points*: universal manhood suffrage, equal electoral districts, no property qualification for MPs, annual elections, payment of MPs, and the secret ballot. All of these but annual Parliaments have since been enacted, but at the time, they were regarded as extremely radical proposals.

One radical proposal that did not appear in the Charter was female suffrage. The first draft drawn up by the London Chartist Association had included a demand for the woman’s vote, but the fear that such a proposal “might retard the suffrage of men” ensured that it was dropped. Most Chartists, moreover, had internalized the doctrine of *separate spheres* for

men and women; many, in fact, were drawn into radical politics by their uneasiness with the new industrial order, particularly the large-scale employment of women and children in factories and the high rates of unemployment for men. The National Female Charter Association, for example, warned that the “order of nature is being inverted” with “the female driven to the factory to labour for her offspring, and her husband unwillingly idle at home, dependent on female labour.” Chartist publications frequently demanded that men be paid higher wages so that women and children could remain at home. “No women’s work except in the hearth and schoolroom” was a frequent Chartist battle cry.

Yet women worked very publicly in the Chartist movement. According to one (male) Chartist, “the women were the better men.” More than one hundred separate Chartist women’s organizations existed. They took a leading role in setting up Chartist day and evening schools for both children and adults, led boycotts of hostile shopkeepers, and organized fundraisers. At Chartist demonstrations and mass rallies, women often assumed their traditional protest role: standing in the front ranks of the protesters, they lobbed jeers, obscenities, and sometimes rocks and mud at the opposing rows of police or soldiers.

Despite such mass participation, Chartism from its very beginnings was divided by personal clashes among its leaders and by strong disagreements over tactics and ultimate objectives. For example, some militants wanted the first Chartist convention to set itself up as an alternative Parliament. Others sought to intimidate Parliament by means of a national strike. Still others hinted broadly at using physical force. The moderates, however, wanted simply to petition Parliament to enact the six points. Most middle-class radicals in the 1839 convention became alarmed at the loose talk of the militants and withdrew. An attempt in 1841–42 to rally middle- and working-class moderates behind a combined program of repeal of the Corn Law and passage of the six points foundered on the rocks of class antagonism. Thereafter, Chartist leaders followed very different paths: some engaged in conspiracy, arming, and drilling; others organized Christian Chartist or temperance and self-help societies. London Chartists were never in phase with those in the industrial North. Moved by old grievances against the local anglicized ruling elite, Welsh Chartists were as much Welsh nationalists as political radicals. Given these divisions, Parliament’s determination to reject the Chartist petitions out of hand, and the government’s aggressive tactics of spies, informers, and preventive arrests, Chartism faced formidable obstacles.

Chartism went through three phases. In the first (1839–40), the Chartist convention adopted the six points, argued about tactics, presented the first Chartist petition (which Parliament rejected overwhelmingly), and then dissolved. Scattered violence followed. In Yorkshire and Lancashire some Chartists conspired for rebellion, and in Newport (South Wales), Welsh Chartists marched on the town. Twenty-four died when the British army moved in and the conspiracy elsewhere fizzled out. In 1839–40, the government arrested more than five hundred Chartists, and a general strike fell flat. By midsummer of 1840, the first phase was over.

Irish-born demagogue Feargus O'Connor (1794–1855) dominated the second phase of Chartist history (1840–42). A landowner, a romantic, and an enemy of the machine age, O'Connor published in England the greatest Chartist newspaper, *The Northern Star*. He was a spellbinding orator, though often a victim of his own rhetoric. He spoke boldly of revolution, but was temperamentally incapable of planning one, and it is doubtful that he meant what he said. In any case, O'Connor in 1842 gathered a second petition for the six points containing about three million signatures. Parliament abruptly rejected it. T. B. Macaulay, historian and MP, spoke for the great majority of the House of Commons when he declared that universal suffrage “would be fatal to the purposes for which government exists,” for it was “utterly incompatible with the existence of civilization.” In the industrial North, violence broke out as workers engaged in strikes and, in some places, removed the plugs from steam boilers to stop factory operations. O'Connor dithered in his attitude toward this industrial action, and moderate Chartists and trade unionists exerted themselves against it. Agitation for a time was quieted.

The third phase (1842–48) included both a back-to-the-land scheme and the final Chartist petition. O'Connor dreamed of restoring the people to the land. He established, therefore, a Chartist cooperative to buy land in England and lease it to individual Chartists. Not only would working people return to a kind of yeoman status, but also the oversupply of labor in industry would be reduced. Unfortunately, after some initial success the cooperative soon sank into deep financial trouble. In 1848, when popular revolutions broke out across Europe, O'Connor returned to petitioning and mass demonstrations. A simultaneous rising of the starving tenantry in Ireland would, he hoped, help overawe the government. O'Connor claimed to have gathered five or six million signatures and planned to deliver the petition to Parliament, accompanied by one hundred thousand Chartists.



The last great Chartist demonstration, 1848. A photograph of the Chartist crowd on Kennington Common, London.

The government recognized the seriousness of the situation, but did not panic. This time, while the northern provinces were relatively quiet, Chartism caught fire in London. The government summoned 4,000 policemen, 8,000 troops, and 85,000 special constables (the great majority of whom were middle-class men) and consulted the duke of Wellington on tactics. Though some 150,000 Chartists gathered on Kennington Common south of the Thames, O'Connor decided not to defy a government ban on a procession across the river to Parliament. Had the Chartists attempted to march on Westminster, a bloodbath would surely have resulted, and possibly a revolutionary conflict would have begun.

In the end, O'Connor delivered the petition (which had less than two million signatures, including obvious fakes such as "the duke of Wellington," "Robert Peel," and "Victoria Rex") by taxicab. Parliament quickly rejected it. The Irish peasantry did not rise up at the key moment, and during the summer of 1848 the London police mopped up conspiratorial bands of Chartists. Worse yet, a parliamentary investigation found the finances of the land cooperative in chaos. The cooperative was closed, and O'Connor spent the rest of his days in an insane asylum.

Chartism thus failed, whereas the Anti-Corn Law League succeeded. The League was better organized, its single policy less revolutionary, and its social base (the middle class) more powerful than that of Chartism. Nevertheless, Chartism was of great historical significance. It did more than any

other popular movement to spread class consciousness among the working people of Britain and to express their antagonism both to the landed proprietors and to the middle class. At the same time, its failure taught British workers that they must operate within the political and economic system for more limited goals. Furthermore, the Chartist episode contributed to the acceptance of the middle class by the landed orders because the two upper classes had stood shoulder to shoulder against the Chartist threat. Lady Palmerston, wife of the Whig statesman, expressed this outcome best: “I am sure,” she wrote, “that it is very fortunate that the whole thing has occurred, as it has shown the good spirit of our middle classes.”

Suggested Reading

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Chapter 15

Ireland from the Union to the Famine

With the Act of Union in 1800, Britain and Ireland in theory became parts of a single state. Yet the differences between Britain and Ireland were fundamental, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland never really worked. While England (along with South Wales and Lowland Scotland) was industrializing and modernizing, Ireland remained a backward agricultural society. Britain was, however painfully, becoming the wealthiest and most progressive society in the world, but Ireland stood stagnant, mired in poverty, agrarian violence, and sectarian strife. It is safe to say that Britain, the predominant partner, never understood Irish problems the way the Irish did—never saw Ireland through Irish eyes. What was called the Irish Question thus became an intractable and frustrating set of issues for the British; what might have been called the British Question became an alternately maddening and demoralizing brick wall for the Irish. If the new state created in 1800 had worked, the attachment of Ireland to Britain could have been of enormous benefit to the mass of Irish people, but it did not, and the consequence was the greatest catastrophe in Irish history.

THE IRISH QUESTION

The so-called Irish Question of the early nineteenth century had three parts: political, religious, and economic. The political aspect arose from the fact that the Act of Union created a situation in which the great majority of the Irish people were disaffected from their government. The Anglican Ascendancy and the Ulster Presbyterians, approximately 15 to 20 percent of the Irish population, thought that the Union was their sole protection, but most of the rest of the Irish regarded the Union as the source and symbol of their oppression. As Arthur Wellesley (later the duke of Wellington) said in

1807, “We have no strength here but our army. Ireland, in a view to military operations, must be viewed as an enemy’s country.” The Act of Union abolished the Irish Parliament and gave Ireland 100 MPs (out of 658) in Parliament at Westminster. Catholics could vote, but could not serve as members of Parliament. From 1801 to 1921, then, all major decisions on Irish policies were made by the British cabinet and Parliament in London, neither of which allowed the Irish much influence.

Likewise, the Catholic majority of the population had little influence on the administrative machinery in Ireland. The lord lieutenant, usually a British nobleman, headed the Irish administration and ruled from Dublin Castle, the symbol of Anglo-Protestant and British governmental power. The main political figure was the chief secretary, a leading British politician who had to defend the government in the House of Commons as well as administer the country on a day-to-day basis. The administrative staff, the legal officers, the magistrates, and the judiciary through whom the lord lieutenant and chief secretary executed policy were all drawn from Irish Protestantism. Protestants also controlled local government.

In the 1820s and 1830s, the scope of government in Ireland expanded to include public works, state education, and a Poor Law. In all of its functions, the Irish executive could depend little on the voluntary services of the aristocracy and gentry; hence, the administration became more centralized than that in England. Because execution of the law was in Protestant hands, the Catholics did not trust the judiciary. In order to see that the law was enforced impartially, British administrators like Peel sometimes adopted measures that would have been unacceptable in England. For instance, they often resorted to *stipendiary magistrates*—magistrates employed by the central administration—instead of local JPs. This tendency toward central governmental control also suited the British attitude toward Ireland, which, despite the Union, held that Ireland was a strange and savage place. As Sir Robert Peel, chief secretary from 1812 to 1818, said, “I believe an honest despotic government would be by far the fittest government for Ireland.”

A kind of honest despotism, answerable to the British Parliament, is in fact what prevailed in Ireland. In order to control endemic agrarian violence as well as dangerous political movements, Parliament frequently resorted to *coercion acts*—laws suspending civil liberties for designated periods of time. Rarely was Ireland in the nineteenth century free from coercion. The British army in Ireland consistently numbered between twenty thousand and forty thousand men and was backed by a yeomanry of another thirty-five thousand. Dublin Castle officials used the army to enforce the law and

even to collect tithes and carry out evictions of tenants for nonpayment of rent. Ireland thus in theory was part of the United Kingdom; in practice it was an occupied country.

The religious aspect of the Irish Question was clear: the established Church of Ireland, which was Anglican, represented only about 10 percent of the population. Nonconformists (mostly Ulster Presbyterians) composed another 8 to 10 percent; all the rest were Roman Catholics. Further, the Church of Ireland was top-heavy with a huge hierarchy: for eight hundred thousand Anglicans, the Church in 1831 had four archbishops; eighteen bishops; numerous cathedrals, deans, and chapters; and about fourteen hundred parish clergymen. Some Anglican parishes had not a single Protestant resident. This lavish establishment was supported by tithes, which all Irishmen, regardless of religion, had to pay. The Catholics hated the tithe, and in the early 1830s resistance to paying the tithe, backed by agrarian secret societies, spread widely through southern Ireland. The government used large numbers of police and army troops to collect the tithe, and the resulting tithe war caused much bloodshed and ill-feeling.

Meanwhile, the Catholic church in Ireland was getting its own house in order. Having survived the penal laws, the Catholic church turned its attention to the twin problems of the population explosion and evangelical Protestant missionaries. The Catholic hierarchy undertook organizational reform, building of churches and chapels, renewal of discipline, and parochial education. By the 1830s, the church had a much firmer grip on the people. Moreover, that grip was exercised at the parish level by priests trained in the Catholic seminaries at Maynooth, Carlow, and elsewhere in Ireland. Whereas the older generation (who now held the top positions in the Irish hierarchy) had been trained abroad, the younger parish clergy (who had close daily contact with the people) were educated at home. One Protestant observer said that the Irish priests “displayed the bitterest feelings of the partisan and the grossest habits of the peasant.” This is a prejudiced view, no doubt, but the Catholic clergyman, who lived in a small world dominated by the Protestant squire, parson, and the tithe collector, did tend to be highly political. To him, Irish patriotism and Catholicism were one and the same.

The economic dimension of the Irish Question was simply that Ireland was very poor. The Irish in the first half of the nineteenth century were caught in a *poverty trap*, in which poverty itself—low incomes, primitive markets, and a low rate of capital formation—defeated every impetus for economic growth. Moreover, the economic obstacles to prosperity were

reinforced by seemingly immovable political and social conditions. Politics, society, and economics fed on each other to make a vicious circle of instability, insecurity, and stagnation.

To begin with, there was, as we have seen, little industrialization in Ireland except in Ulster. The Union had envisioned a single free-trade area for the British Isles, but when free trade was actually enacted in 1824, it had severe consequences for the Irish economy. The cotton textile industry centered in Belfast was destroyed by competition from British mills. Belfast was able to switch back to its old staple, linen; however, in the rest of Ireland, British machine-made goods ruined the most important cottage industry, domestic weaving. Given the comparative attractiveness of the burgeoning English and Scottish industrial sector, no one wanted to invest in new industries in Ireland. There was little capital in Ireland, and few English or Scottish investors wanted to transfer their capital into the Emerald Isle. Outside of Ulster, therefore, the great majority of the Irish people became more dependent than ever on agriculture.

Irish farming in the first half of the century was able to increase its production, but it remained inefficient compared to English agriculture, now in the full tide of agricultural revolution. In Ireland, there was a steady shift of land from tillage to pasturage, but not much improvement of farming techniques. The problem once again was lack of investment. In order to improve farming, some part of Irish society had to invest in the reorganization of the land, new crops, fertilizer, scientific breeding, and so on. But no one did. Landless laborers and cottiers (cottagers) were too poor to do so and tenant farmers too insecure of their holdings. Tenants feared that, if they made improvements, their rents would go up. Only in Ulster, where *Ulster custom* prevailed, were tenants entitled to compensation for improvements that they made on their land; not surprisingly, in Ulster tenants were more progressive farmers, and landlord-tenant relations were more cooperative than in Leinster, Munster, and Connacht. Irish landlords had the money to invest, and a few in fact tried to improve their estates, but the results inevitably involved evictions of "excess" tenants and considerable violence. Fearful of the chronic agrarian terrorism that afflicted the countryside, landlords tended to view improvements as a bad bargain.

The great majority of the Irish people still depended on the land for a living. Upwards of two-thirds of all occupied people worked in farming. They labored on the land, but did not own it. In England, the tendency was for landholdings to grow in size, but in Ireland, the rapid increase in the population and the lack of alternative employment put enormous pressure on the

land. By subdivision, tenancies became smaller and smaller, as did the plots of land rented by cottiers and wage laborers. A royal commission in 1845 found that to sustain a family of five, a farm in Ireland had to be between six and ten acres, but by the 1840s, 45 percent of all holdings were below five acres, and another 37 percent were between five and fifteen acres.

Meanwhile, competition for holdings and a general decline of agricultural prices pushed rentals (in terms of tenants' purchasing power) up. Arrears of rent were common, as were evictions for nonpayment of rent. To defend themselves from rent increases and eviction, Irish peasants formed secret societies, which used tactics such as cattle mutilation and assassination to intimidate not only landlords, but also tenants who dared bid for a holding from which a family had been evicted. Whiteboys, Whitefeet, Ribbonmen, Rockites, and the like spread widely, especially from the 1820s. Most observers thought that the violence protected the peasantry from predatory landlords, but it also contributed significantly to the vicious circle of poverty and stagnation.

The hard-pressed Irish population became even more dependent on the potato. Generally, the Irish tenants and cottiers produced grain, pigs, and cattle, either on their own holdings or on someone else's, to pay the rent, but they grew potatoes to feed themselves. The poorer the region (mainly in the West), the greater the dependency on the potato. By the 1840s, one-third of all land under tillage was devoted to potatoes, and one-third of the population (nine-tenths in County Mayo) ate little else. Travelers in Ireland even noticed fewer pigs living in the peasants' huts, not because standards of hygiene had gone up, but because fewer cottiers and laborers could afford them. Cash money had little part to play in the life of the ordinary peasant in the western counties; in these rocky lands there was at best a primitive market system and little access to alternative foodstuffs. Localized famine was common wherever the potato crop failed. This was a setting for disaster.

DANIEL O'CONNELL AND CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION

It would seem obvious that Ireland in the early nineteenth century was ripe for revolution, but in the opening decades of the century, the Irish political scene was quiet. Most Protestants had turned against patriotic politics and looked to the Union as their salvation. The small Catholic middle class had no way to revoke the Act of Union. The demoralized masses were inert, and the horrors of 1798 were fresh in everyone's mind. Thus, when the youthful Robert Emmet, a Protestant lawyer, and the vestiges of the

United Irishmen staged a rising in Dublin in 1803, it was abortive. Emmet's rebellion came to nothing except his own execution and the making of another martyr for the revolutionary strain in Irish nationalism. Independence or autonomy for Ireland was out of the question.

Full civil and political rights for Catholics were another matter. The Younger Pitt, it will be remembered, had hoped to include Catholic emancipation as part of a package with the Union. In the decades after the Union, many English and Scottish Whigs as well as radicals adopted the issue. In Ireland, middle-class and professional Catholics also continued to work for emancipation, partly on principle and partly in the hope that they would benefit directly from public office or the prestige of a seat in Parliament. Divisions within the Irish Catholic leadership, however, weakened the campaign's impact. The divisions had to do with the questions of *safeguards* insisted on by the British as the price of emancipation: first, state control over appointments of Catholic bishops, and second, state payment of the Catholic clergy. Presumably, these safeguards would ensure the loyalty of the Catholic church, and many upper-class English and Irish Catholics were content to accept them. Other Irish Catholics, however, including most priests and some bishops, would not; consequently, the movement was paralyzed.

Then in 1823, Daniel O'Connell transformed the Catholic emancipation movement. One of the great leaders of Irish nationalism in the nineteenth century and enshrined in Irish memory as "The Liberator," O'Connell (1775–1847) was the heir of an old Catholic gentry family of County Kerry. Educated abroad in French Catholic schools, O'Connell read for the bar in London and then became a successful and popular lawyer in Dublin. While studying in London, he became a deist and a Benthamite. The deism he soon abandoned when he returned to Catholicism, but the Benthamism he retained. O'Connell was thus one of a certain European type—a liberal Catholic—but also a paternalist landlord, fluent in Gaelic, as well as a passionate Irish patriot strongly opposed to the Union. His firsthand experience of the French Revolution in 1791–93 and of the Irish rebellion of 1798, however, gave him a permanent abhorrence of revolutionary violence. His reaction to the bloody Wexford rising (see chapter 11) reflected a profound insight: "Good God! What a brute man becomes when ignorant and oppressed! Oh liberty, what horrors are perpetuated in thy name! May every virtuous revolutionary remember the horrors of Wexford."

As a Catholic barrister practicing in the Irish law courts, O'Connell was intensely aware of the civil disabilities suffered by Catholics. Yet he refused

to accept emancipation with the safeguards, on grounds that religious liberty should not be won at the price of shackling the church. His goal was to win emancipation without the safeguards; his strategy was to harness a mass popular agitation to a constitutional parliamentary movement. In 1823 he helped found a new Catholic Association and the next year opened it to ordinary tenant farmers by reducing the membership fee to a penny a month. A stroke of genius, this decision enabled the Catholic Association to tap the energy of the tenants and to collect thousands of pounds a year for its political fund. Moreover, it mobilized the parish priests, who were held in great esteem in the Catholic communities and who happily urged their parishioners each Sunday to join the Association.

O'Connell's Catholic Association was the first modern political organization in Britain. Why did it succeed in appealing to the Irish peasantry, who, after all, would not personally benefit from Catholic emancipation? (The franchise remained limited to large property owners.) One reason was that O'Connell had the gifts of uncanny eloquence and a magical voice. He was a born demagogue, who by his forceful denunciations of British rule, acted out the wishes and dreams of his mass audiences. He spoke to the people from within their traditions and appealed to their sense of independence and pride. At the same time, O'Connell made the agitation seem dangerous to the authorities because, although always eschewing revolution, he deliberately referred to the violence that might occur if Catholic emancipation were not granted. In British eyes, there loomed behind O'Connell the shadowy nightmare of popular revolution.

In 1826, the Catholic Association turned to direct electoral pressure. In the counties, approximately eighty-five thousand Catholic tenants had the vote as forty-shilling freeholders. Traditionally, they yielded to intimidation and voted with their landlords. But the Catholic Association and the parish priests were able to persuade the tenants in Waterford and five other constituencies to defy their landlords and vote for parliamentary candidates supporting Catholic emancipation. In 1828, O'Connell himself dared stand for Parliament in County Clare. He won decisively and thereby presented Wellington and Peel, the leaders of the Tory government, with a hard choice: whether to give in to pressure for emancipation or to reject O'Connell's election (and all the others that were sure to follow) and use military force against the rising that almost everyone expected to be the result.

As we saw in chapter 14, Wellington and Peel gave in. They did, however, exact a stiff price: the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 allowed Catholics to sit in Parliament and to hold all but a few Crown offices, but it

raised the property qualification for voters to possession of freehold land worth at least £10 (a fivefold increase from the previous 40 shillings) and so disfranchised about 80 percent of the Irish electorate. O'Connell struggled against the disfranchisement, but finally agreed to it because both the English Whigs and the upper-class Irish Catholics supported it and undermined his resistance. Otherwise, Catholic emancipation was a great victory for O'Connell, for the act opened all public offices (except an insignificant few) and Parliament to Catholics, and it included no safeguards.

O'Connell took his seat in the House of Commons in 1830 and for some years enjoyed unparalleled popularity—even adulation—in Ireland. Many Irish Protestants gloomily predicted the end of their Ascendancy, fearing that democracy, disestablishment, and confiscation of property would follow; many peasants joyfully expected the same outcome. In the short run both were wrong. Still, O'Connell's triumph in the campaign for Catholic emancipation was of immense significance. For one thing, it taught the Irish people that they could win by demands and agitation what they could not by reason and persuasion. For another, it affirmed the importance of priests in national politics. Most importantly, O'Connell's strategy welded Irish nationalism to Catholicism—an ironic outcome, given that O'Connell, a liberal Catholic devoted to religious toleration, envisaged a nonsectarian Ireland.

REPEAL AND YOUNG IRELAND

O'Connell had always intended Catholic emancipation to be the first step toward his ultimate objective: repeal of the Act of Union. Neither a republican nor a separatist, he sought a dual monarchy: “I desire no social revolution, no social change,” he said. “In short, salutary restoration without revolution, an Irish Parliament, British connection, one King, two legislatures.” But he faced total opposition from the British Parliament on this issue. Not only were the Conservatives unalterably opposed to repeal, but so also were O'Connell's former Whig and radical allies. When he first raised the question in Parliament (in 1834), he was defeated by 532 to 39. His support included, besides his own repeal party, only one English MP, who was none other than the future Chartist (and Irish nationalist) Feargus O'Connor.

Given this blanket opposition, O'Connell thought it wise to win from Parliament whatever help he could for the Irish people within the structure of the Union. Though the Whigs were as touchy on law and order in Ireland

as the most unbending Tories, at least they included Ireland in their program of parliamentary reform. Hence, the Irish Reform Act of 1832 expanded the electorate, particularly in the boroughs, and gave Ireland five extra seats. In 1833, the Whig government reorganized the Anglican Irish Church, abolishing ten bishoprics and reducing the income of the others. Hoping for additional reforms, O'Connell made an alliance in 1835 with the Whigs—the so-called Lichfield House Compact.

By this agreement, O'Connell and his repealers acted with the Liberal parliamentary alliance and put repeal on the back burner. The alliance, however, was for O'Connell only moderately successful. The Whig government in 1838 tried to solve the problem of Irish tithes, but against ferocious opposition it was able only to convert the tithe into a rent charge in effect collected by the landlords. In 1839, the Whigs imposed on Ireland the dubious gift of a Poor Law system, complete with workhouses. In 1840, a reform of Irish municipal corporations was passed.

The most beneficial aspect of O'Connell's alliance with the Whigs was a change in the tone of the Dublin Castle administration. The key figure in this administrative reform was the Scotsman Thomas Drummond (1797–1840), undersecretary from 1835 to 1840. Determined to enforce the law without the usual prejudice in favor of the Protestants, Drummond opened the Irish judiciary as well as civil service to Catholics, and even evicted from the bench the more bigoted Protestants. He took strong action against secret terrorist societies, but for once also brought pressure on the Protestant Orange Order and so broke its political power. Drummond understood the economic roots of agrarian crime and admonished the landlords that “property has its duties as well as its rights.” In sum, Drummond did more than any other British official before 1870 to win the confidence of the Catholic majority.

Drummond, however, died in 1840, and with the Whig government on its last legs, O'Connell decided to renew the campaign for repeal of the Union. There was no prospect of allying with the Conservative leader, known to the Irish as “Orange Peel.” In 1840, therefore, O'Connell founded the Loyal National Repeal Association, hoping to win repeal by the same tactics as in 1828–29: parliamentary pressure backed by a massive popular agitation in Ireland.

The moment seemed ripe for repeal, in part because of the inspired journalism of a small number of romantic journalists called Young Ireland. In 1842, three young men devoted to the cultural as well as the political autonomy of Ireland founded *The Nation* newspaper. They were Thomas



O'Connell Memorial, Dublin. Designed by John Henry Foley, 1882.

This massive memorial to Daniel O'Connell bears witness to the Liberator's central role in the history of modern Ireland. The memorial stands at the southern end of one of Dublin's main streets: known as Sackville Street while Ireland was part of the United Kingdom, it was renamed O'Connell Street in 1924 after the formation of the Irish Free State.

Davis (a Protestant barrister), Charles Gavan Duffy (an Ulster Catholic), and John Blake Dillon (a southern Catholic). Their policy was repeal of the Union, but their ultimate goal was renewal of the Irish identity based on old Irish cultural traditions and a potent mythology of Irish heroes and martyrs. They wanted the Irish to be more than “West Britain.” Their national ideal was nonsectarian, and their propaganda was lofty and effective. By 1843, *The Nation* had a readership of more than 250,000.

Backed by *The Nation*, O’Connell designated 1843 as the repeal year. He staged a series of giant open-air gatherings dubbed monster meetings to demonstrate the depth of Irish feeling. More than one hundred thousand people attended some of these monster meetings. O’Connell spoke at the meetings in a crescendo of violent rhetoric. To cautious people in England and Ireland, he seemed to be threatening revolution. In June 1843, for example, he warned his audience that “you may have the alternative to live as slaves or die as freemen.” By the autumn of 1843, the political temperature of Ireland was at its peak, and the British, already concerned about Chartism, felt embattled.

The problem for O’Connell was that he was deliberately bluffing and had no alternate plan should the British government simply defy him. And defy him they did. Prime minister Peel and his Conservatives, as well as nearly all the Liberals, simply would not countenance repeal of the Union. In 1834 Peel had declared: “I feel and know that the Repeal must lead to dismemberment of this great empire; must make Great Britain a fourth-rate power of Europe, and Ireland a savage wilderness.” What repeal ran up against, then, was British nationalism, the deep British mistrust of Catholicism, and the British certainty that autonomy for Ireland would destroy the empire. Peel said in 1843: “Deprecating as I do all war, above all, civil war, yet there is no alternative which I do not think preferable to the dismemberment of this empire.” In October 1843, Peel banned what was to be the biggest monster meeting and summoned troops to enforce that ban. O’Connell, who had always loathed violence and bloodshed, canceled the meeting. Even so, the government arrested him shortly afterward and convicted him of conspiracy. O’Connell was imprisoned for five months and emerged a more cautious and weary man. The repeal agitation was finished.

THE GREAT FAMINE, 1845–1850

Repeal was in any case soon made irrelevant to the Irish masses. Famine became the reality, and suffering was the everyday experience of millions of



The Great Famine in Ireland, 1846: starving peasants receiving charity along a roadside.

Irish men, women, and children. In the autumn of 1845, the Irish potato crop was heavily damaged by a fungus now recognized as *phytophthora infestans*. The blight turned most of the potatoes into a foul mass of putrefying pulp. Dependent as they were on the potato, a large segment of the Irish population suffered grievously through the winter of 1845–46 and then the crop of 1846 failed utterly. The winter of 1846–47 brought widespread starvation and disease. Many peasant families ate their seed potatoes; therefore, although the blight did less damage in 1847, the harvest was too small. In 1848, the potato crop failed totally again and only began to improve in 1849. By 1850, the blight had largely disappeared, but in the meantime famine had made a horror of life in Ireland.

Population statistics reveal the impact of the Great Famine in stark terms. In 1841, the Irish population stood at 8.2 million people, and by its natural rate of increase would have risen to about 9 million in 1851. In actuality, the census of 1851 found only 6.5 million, leaving a gap of about 2.5 million between the expected and the actual population. Of these, about 1.5 million were emigrants; the rest, about 1 million people, were the casualties of the Great Famine. Some died of hunger, but most died of famine-related diseases such as typhus, relapsing fever, and dysentery. These million dead amounted to nearly 20 percent of the Irish population of 1841. For compar-

ison, it should be noted that Ireland lost more people because of the Famine than all of Britain did in any war between 1688 and the present.

Irish suffering during the Famine is incalculable. The poorest elements in the society—laborers and cottiers—suffered most, but the small tenant farmers, particularly in the west, also faced terrible deprivation. None of these classes had any reserves of wealth or possessions with which to buy food. Irish farms, ironically, continued to produce food throughout the famine years, and indeed Irish farmers and merchants continued to export food (grain, cattle, and dairy products) to England, Scotland, and Wales. But the Irish peasants who grew those foodstuffs to pay their rent had nothing left after the rent with which to buy food. Thousands fell into arrears on their rents anyway, and many were evicted. Evicted families crowded the roads and poured into overfull workhouses and hospitals. Reports by careful observers of the misery of the people are numerous and heartbreaking: reports of women and children starving, of bodies too numerous to be buried, of dogs eating corpses. Here is a passage from one letter written by a magistrate to the duke of Wellington:

I accordingly went on the 15th instant [December 1846] to Skibbereen. . . . I was surprised to find the wretched hamlet apparently deserted. I entered some of the hovels to ascertain the cause, and the scenes which presented themselves were such as no tongue or pen can convey the slightest idea of. In the first, six famished and ghastly skeletons, to all appearances dead, were huddled in a corner on some filthy straw, their sole covering what seemed a ragged horsecloth, their wretched legs hanging about, naked above the knees. I approached with horror, and found by a low moaning they were alive—they were in fever, four children, a woman and what had once been a man.

The suffering of the emigrants was scarcely less. Emigration was an old story in Irish history: approximately 1.75 million emigrated between 1780 and 1845, most of them choking the streets and alleys of Britain's worst industrial slums. Now, most went either directly to North America or to Liverpool, where they found passage to Canada or the United States. In both cases, the crossing was hazardous and miserable. Many of the ships called into the passenger service were inadequate. Some sank; on others the mortality rate ranged from a third to a half. For instance, the *Agnes* sailed in 1847; of her 427 passengers, only 150 survived. Even when they arrived in the New World, the Irish emigrants faced severe hardships. These rural people were forced practically overnight to become urban dwellers, and at the bottom rank of society to boot. The Anglo-Saxon (and Protestant) American elite hardly welcomed this influx of poor Catholics; "No Irish" signs became a common feature of cities such as Boston and New York. Over time, the

Irish in America learned to protect themselves by building self-sufficiency in their neighborhoods through Catholic parishes, parochial schools, and machine politics. This experience nurtured their Irish identity, and the Irish immigrant communities in America became hotbeds of intensely anti-British Irish nationalism.

Together, a pernicious blend of inability, ignorance, and ideology ensured that the British government's response to the Famine was horribly inadequate. Peel, who was prime minister when the Famine began, largely embraced the liberal ideal of non-activist government, but faced with the emergency in Ireland, he acted energetically. In November 1845, he had his agents in America buy £100,000 of Indian corn (maize) to be sold cheaply to local relief organizations, and he helped set up committees of Irish landlords to collect charitable funds and distribute food. Like most liberals, however, Peel believed that food distribution interfered with the market, harmed private merchants, and threatened to make the hungry dependent on the state. Thus, he also set the Board of Works to construct roads in Ireland as a means of providing employment and, most importantly, he undertook repeal of the Corn Law in 1846. If trade were free, Peel believed, the natural force of competition would ensure the flow of cheap grain into Ireland. As we have seen in the previous chapter, repealing the Corn Law was a costly decision for Peel. It split his party and brought down his government. And, tragically, as far as Ireland was concerned, free trade in grain did not work: the impoverished Irish people could not generate any economic demand for food.

Peel's successor as prime minister was Lord John Russell (1792–1878), scion of one of the grandest Whig families, a hero of 1832, and a strong liberal in his social and economic views. The actual day-to-day execution of British governmental policy in Ireland rested with Sir Charles Trevelyan (1807–86), assistant secretary to the Treasury, a doctrinaire liberal who declared that “the great evil” in Ireland was not famine but “the selfish, perverse, and turbulent character of the people.” Trevelyan regarded the Famine as an act of divine providence, the means by which God would remake Ireland along English lines. By forcing Irish peasants off the land, Trevelyan contended, the Famine would also force landowners to modernize Irish agriculture, revitalize the Irish economy, and so transform Irish society.

Two assumptions guided Russell and Trevelyan in their policy making: first, that too much assistance would “demoralize” the hungry Irish—it would rob men of their self-reliance and hence their future ability to take care of themselves and their families—and second, that the market, not gov-

ernment, must determine food prices. Forced by events into intervening in Ireland, Russell and Trevelyan nevertheless struggled incessantly to minimize the government's role. "It must be thoroughly understood," Russell wrote in 1846, "that we cannot feed the people." He did not mean that he intended the Irish poor to starve; his faith in *laissez-faire* economics, however, made such an outcome inevitable. As one government agent in Ireland wrote Trevelyan, "You cannot answer the cry of want by a quotation from political economy."

Initially, the scale of the Famine in Ireland compelled Russell's government, like Peel's before it, to adopt interventionist policies that contradicted its liberal ideals. It first expanded the public works program that Peel had initiated. By the end of 1846, however, the failure of the program was all too clear. Starving, diseased, emaciated Irish men and women could not perform the physical labor of road building. In early 1847, then, the Whig government took the dramatic step of ordering that soup kitchens be set up all over Ireland to feed the starving. In the months that it took to get the kitchens up and running, thousands and thousands died, but by the summer of 1847, the soup kitchens were feeding three million people a day.

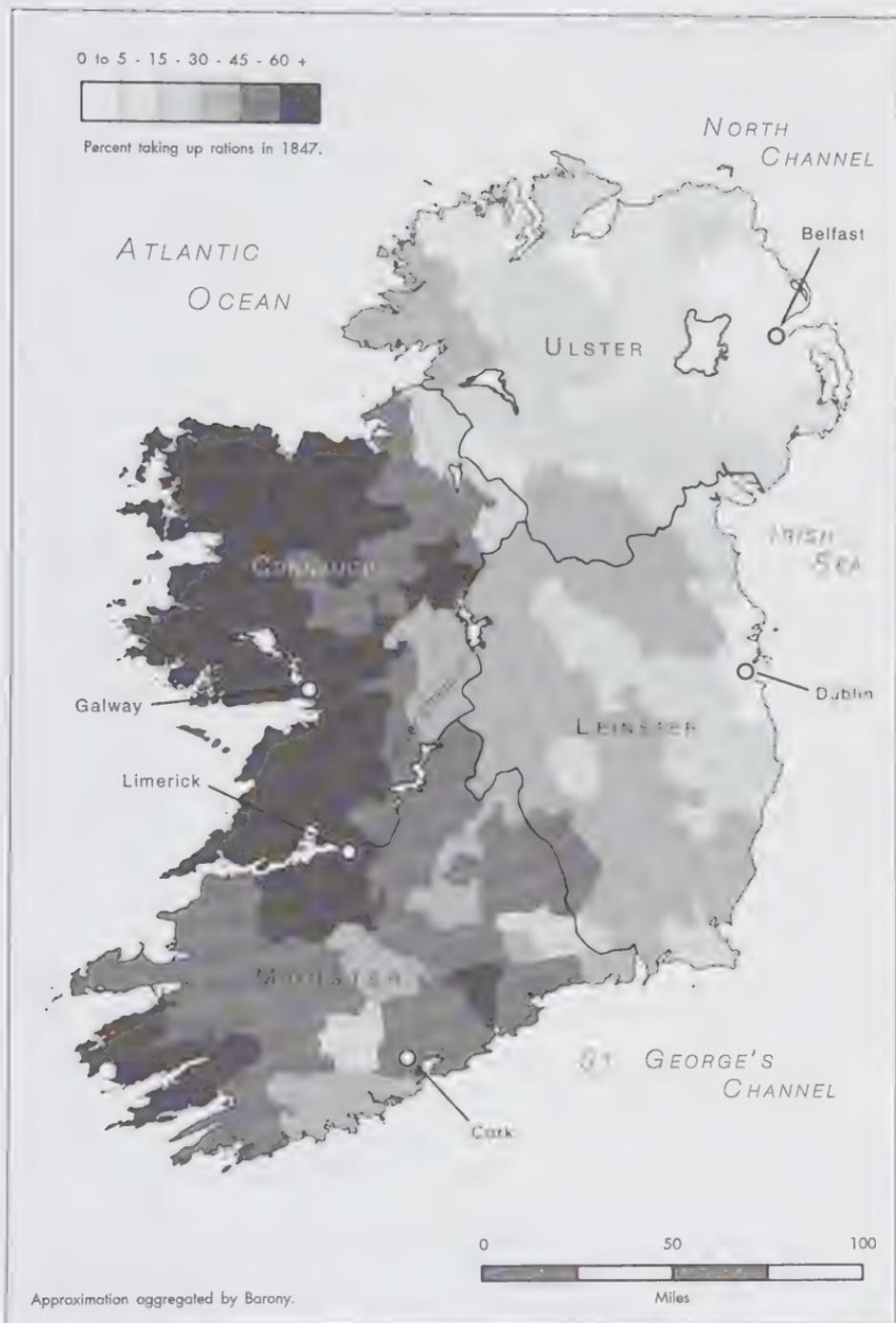
Russell's government did not, however, view the direct feeding of the hungry as a satisfactory policy. Instead, it declared in mid-1847 that "Irish property must pay for Irish poverty"—that taxes paid by the Irish landowning and middle classes must cover the costs of famine relief through the Poor Law. Russell and Trevelyan saw Irish landowners as lazy wastrels who must be taught the lessons of political economy. Optimistic reports about the fall potato harvest, its own nervousness about the detrimental effects of government intervention in the economy, and its determination to shift the burden onto the Irish propertied classes led Russell's government to halt the soup kitchen program in September of 1847. The results were disastrous. The debt-ridden Irish property owners could not pay the necessary taxes and the numbers of the starving overwhelmed Irish workhouses. Diseases such as typhus spread quickly through the overcrowded buildings, which soon became little more than charnel houses. Numbers in the workhouses peaked in 1849, numbers of evictions in 1850. Yet the Russell government held fast to its decision: the Poor Law must be allowed to work. It didn't.

Voluntary charitable efforts by the British were impressive, although inadequate by themselves for the task at hand. Various relief organizations, most notably the British Relief Association, raised funds in England and Ireland for soup kitchens and infirmaries. The Quakers distinguished

themselves in this voluntary effort by sending many Friends to Ireland, where they not only set up the first soup kitchens, but also reported back to England about the true state of affairs in Ireland. The established Church of Ireland also did what it could to relieve distress, though some Anglican clergymen demanded conversion as the price of food. The actions of this minority in the Church of Ireland left a legacy of bitterness in the Catholic peasants that lasted long after the Famine was over.

Increased bitterness between the Irish and English was in fact one of the important consequences of the Great Famine. Many Irish concluded that the British had let Irish men, women, and children starve even though Britain was the wealthiest nation on earth, and that the British would never have let a million Englishmen or Scotsmen perish when food was available. (In fact, the potato crop in the western Highlands and islands of Scotland also failed, and Highland crofters suffered as grievously as the Irish poor.) The Irish survivors of the Famine at home and abroad repeatedly expressed their bitterness toward England in violence and bloodshed, as well as in song and verse. Many English, on the other hand, concluded that Irish elites were incompetent and irresponsible and that Irish peasants were a savage, even racially inferior people. The conservative *Quarterly Review* put it this way: “. . . all of the civilization, arts, comfort, wealth that Ireland enjoys she owes exclusively to England . . . all her absurdities, errors, misery she owes herself.”

The Great Famine was a watershed in Irish economic and social history. The immediate demographic consequence we have already seen; the Irish population never recovered to its pre-1845 level. Moreover, the Famine began to roll back the subdivision of land. In 1841, 45 percent of all agricultural holdings in Ireland were between one and five acres; in 1851, only 16 percent were. As consolidation of holdings slowly went forward, so also did cereal farming and cattle grazing. Small family farms worked by tenants became the norm; furthermore, the new but profound concern of the tenants with protecting the family farm caused a rise in the average age at marriage and a corresponding decline in the birth rate. Unfortunately, *landlordism* (the predatory attitude of Irish landlords) survived. Many of the old landowners lost their estates to savvy investors and middlemen during the Famine. These new owners, however, proved to be just as devoted as their predecessors to collecting rents without providing agricultural leadership. Here were the roots of rural tension and violence in Ireland for the next fifty years.



The Famine in Ireland. As this map clearly shows, the peoples of Connaught and Munster suffered the most severely during the Famine.

YOUNG IRELAND AND 1848

Relations between Daniel O'Connell and Young Ireland cracked under the stress of the Famine. The ineffectiveness of the British governmental response pushed *The Nation* toward a more militant stance. One editorial declared: "Better a little blood-letting to show that there is blood, than a patient dragging of chains and pining beneath them slowly for generations leading to the belief that all spirit is fled." O'Connell, however, responded firmly that "the greatest political advantages are not worth one drop of blood." This dispute aggravated disagreements between O'Connell and the Young Irelanders. After the failure of repeal in 1843 and the return of the Whigs to office in 1846, O'Connell thought it best to work with the Whigs in order to get what he could for Ireland. The Young Irelanders, however, preferred to stick defiantly to repeal. By mid-1846, the repeal movement had split wide open. Early in 1847, the Young Irelanders withdrew from the Repeal Association and founded their own organization, the Irish Confederation.

From that moment on, some Young Irelanders slipped hesitantly into a revolutionary posture. O'Connell, by then fatally ill, made one last pathetic appeal to Parliament for help against the Famine and then died on the way to Rome. Young Ireland became more radical. One of the radicalizing influences was James Fintan Lalor, who joined Young Ireland in 1847. He emphasized the rights of the tenants against those of the landlords and urged that "the national movement" temporarily be put aside for a tenant-right agitation. Everyone recognized that in Ireland tenant rights were a socially explosive issue. Another Young Irishman, John Mitchel, took up Lalor's ideas and began to combine them with advocacy of physical force. He wrote, "It is indeed full time that we cease to whine and begin to act . . . Good heavens, to think that we should go down without a struggle."

Despite the advent of such views within the Young Ireland movement, there was no overt action toward violent revolution until early 1848. The outbreak of the European revolutions of 1848, first in France and then throughout much of central Europe, precipitated the Young Ireland conspiracy. Mitchel and some other Young Irelanders seized the moment to call for an Irish republic—a step far beyond repeal of the Union. These Young Irelanders sent a deputation to Paris and established relations with the British Chartists. Once again, as in 1796–98, the British government faced a dangerous combination of British radicals and Irish nationalists.

Unfortunately for them, the Young Irelanders made poor revolutionaries. Government spies penetrated their organization. Young Ireland's leaders failed utterly to coordinate their rising with the Chartists. Mitchel was arrested and convicted of sedition in March of 1848, and in July Parliament suspended habeas corpus in Ireland. Aware that the government would soon arrest them, a few Young Irelanders set out to raise the peasantry of south-central Ireland in revolt. The leader was William Smith O'Brien, a chivalrous Protestant landlord who completely lacked the ruthlessness required of a successful revolutionary. The peasants were much too beaten down by the Famine to respond; they had no arms and no organization, and their priests urged them not to rebel. The *Rising* of 1848 thus ended in a miserable scuffle in a cabbage patch in County Tipperary. The leaders were arrested, convicted, and transported to Australia.

Tragic-comic as it was, the Young Ireland rising of 1848 nevertheless had considerable significance. The Young Irelanders' romantic and nonsectarian brand of nationalism and their refusal to renounce the revolutionary heritage inspired many later nationalists. Their defiant gesture in 1848 helped emphasize to Irish nationalists the notion that revolutionary acts, no matter how hopeless, can be morally elevating. The connection made by Young Ireland between tenant rights and nationalism, like their rejection of English utilitarian and laissez-faire principles, tended to radicalize subsequent Irish nationalist movements. Irish politicians after 1848 turned for a time to conventional parliamentary tactics, but the idealistic and extremist strain typified by Young Ireland did not die out.

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Chapter 16

Mid-Victorian Society and Culture, 1850–1870

The disintegration of Chartism and the collapse of Young Ireland in 1848 marked the end of more than a half-century of social and political turmoil. In Britain there followed a period of relative prosperity and social harmony. Poverty, urban misery, and class divisions did not disappear, but economic conditions improved compared to what had gone before, and social conflict was channeled into workable institutions. An atmosphere of confidence bathed the society. This atmosphere was reinforced by English preeminence within the British Isles and by British preeminence on the seas and in the world markets. The result was what Professor E. L. Burn has called the Age of Equipose—the two decades of the 1850s and 1860s, when social and cultural forces reached a precarious equilibrium: forces of continuity seemed to balance those of change; forces of conservatism seemed to balance those of progress.

The mid-Victorian years from 1850 to 1870 were the high noon of Victorianism. On the basis of relative security and prosperity, the high culture of Victorianism flourished and blossomed. Later, Modernists of the twentieth century were to react strongly against Victorian culture, and Victorianism still carries negative connotations of bourgeois complacency and hypocrisy. This hostility toward Victorian culture fails to give credit to the Victorians, either for their achievements or for the sincerity of their attempts to deal with difficult problems. In culture, as in society, Victorianism was a balance of dynamic forces—conservative and progressive, believing and doubting, romantic and utilitarian.

ECONOMIC STABILITY

Prosperity, or at least the illusion of it, was the foundation of the mid-Victorian equipose. Britain in the 1850s and 1860s was the greatest nation

on earth because of its economic power. Britain's head start in commercial and industrial expansion put it for a time far in advance of other countries. In 1850, for example, the British produced about 28 percent of the world's industrial output, including 60 percent of the coal, 50 percent of the iron, 70 percent of the steel, and nearly 50 percent of the cotton textiles. By the 1860s, the British controlled 25 percent of the world's trade, and an even greater percentage of international trade in manufactured goods. Britain had become "the workshop of the world."

Even the agricultural sector of the economy prospered. The repeal of the Corn Law in 1846 did not result in any decline of farm prices or rents. As a result of the Agricultural Revolution, British farming by 1850 was among the most advanced in the world, and in the 1850s and 1860s British farmers adopted even more productive techniques. The consequent highly intensive and capitalized method was called *high farming*. It included the use of steam engines for plowing and harvesting and systematic fertilization to increase crop yields. At mid-century, therefore, the British could still produce about half of the wheat and six-sevenths of the meat they consumed. The mid-Victorian years were a golden age for British agriculture as well as for British industry.

The productive power of the British industrial sector gave Britain an unusual position in the world economy. The British sold manufactured goods abroad and in turn imported vast quantities of primary products (food and raw materials). Foreign trade had always been important to the process of industrialization in Britain, but now it became more so, rising to 25 percent of the gross national product (GNP). Britain sat like a spider at the center of a web of worldwide trade. In the mid-Victorian years, more than one-fourth of all international trade passed through British ports. This fact allowed the British to enjoy very healthy *invisible income*—that is, profits from the transactions of trade itself, such as finance, insurance, brokerage, and shipping, plus capital investment abroad. The British owned perhaps one-third of all the merchant ships in the world, and by the 1870s they were earning £50 million a year as a return on their foreign investments. This invisible income was crucial to the British economy because it made up a substantial deficit between imports and exports. Britain was not only the workshop but also the banker and creditor of the world.

The mid-Victorian decades also brought conditions of stability and growth that contributed to an expansive attitude among businessmen. After a slowing of the rate of growth in the early 1840s, the British enjoyed a fresh bout of economic growth from the early 1850s through the mid-

1860s, mainly due to the rapid construction of railways. Moreover, because of the rapid accumulation of capital, the banks were able to keep interest rates low, which made additional investments in industry relatively cheap. More important yet for the middle-class mood was a mild inflation: the mid-Victorian years saw an increase in prices, not enough to dampen demand but sufficient to bring commercial and industrial men the sense of ever-improving earnings. Prices generally ran ahead of wages paid to working people; hence, businessmen enjoyed improved profit margins. For this reason, British businessmen of the 1850s and 1860s were somewhat less anxiety-ridden and somewhat more openhanded in granting wage increases to their workers than they had been in the first half of the century.

MUTING OF SOCIAL CONFLICT

The expansive attitude of mid-Victorian commercial and industrial men contributed to a muting of social conflict. Social tensions eased—or were at least channeled into safe outlets—even though trends in the economy led to an increase in inequality. Wages continued to do less well than profits and rents. In 1803, for instance, the richest 2 percent of families in Britain enjoyed one-fifth of the national income; in 1867, the richest 2 percent had two-fifths. True, wages did rise, but not as fast as prices or profits. Moreover, as Victorian firms matured, there were fewer opportunities for working men to go from rags to riches than in the early days of industrial triumph. Nevertheless, this period did see a general movement of working people from lower paid to higher paid jobs, made possible by the broad expansion of the economy and the consequent multiplication of semiskilled, skilled, and clerical positions.

More important than actual social mobility was the myth of social mobility. As we have seen in chapter 13, the middle class preached to the working class the ideas of self-help and the self-made individual. By self-help, the message went, any person could rise in the world. Britain enjoyed, wrote Walter Bagehot, “a system of removable inequalities.” In the words of Lord Palmerston,

We have shown the example of a nation in which every class of society accepts with cheerfulness that lot which Providence has assigned to it, while at the same time each individual of each class is constantly trying to raise himself in the social scale not by injustices and wrong, not by violence and illegality, but by persevering good conduct and by the steady and energetic exertion of moral and intellectual faculties with which the Creator had endowed him.

That a viscount could mouth such bourgeois sentiments is proof conclusive of the triumph of middle-class ideas.

Of particular importance as the propagandist for these middle-class social ideals was Samuel Smiles (1812–1904), a Scottish doctor, journalist, and railway executive who wrote a number of best-sellers in the years between 1850 and 1880: *Self-Help*, *Thrift*, *Lives of the Engineers*, *Character*, and *Duty*. His view was that neither political radicalism nor socialism could help the working class; instead, individual moral reform was required. Smiles preached a simple and clear message: “Thrift is the basis of Self-Help and the foundation of much that is excellent in character.” Illustrated by inspirational biographies, this message had a strong impact at a time when, because of the failure of Chartism and the consolidation of the factory system, many British working men and women were inclined to accept their place in the industrial capitalism.

Furthermore, the doctrines of self-help and the self-made individual were part of a package of softened middle-class attitudes and social policies. As chapter 14 showed, by the 1850s evangelicalism and paternalism were merging with utilitarian expertise to produce genuine social improvements such as the factory acts and public health reform. Temperance reform and *rational recreation*, both preached by the middle-class to the working-class, were genuinely meant to help working men and women rise in material well-being and social status. These middle-class virtues in part were supposed to make the working class tame and orderly, but they were also an invitation to join the middle class in respectability. Whereas Hannah More and other upper-class propagandists of the early nineteenth century sought to keep the laboring poor in their proper place, intellectual leaders of the mid-Victorian middle-class stressed the unity rather than the differences between middle-class and working-class folk. They insisted that, given the appropriate education and charitable treatment, individual members of the working class could achieve the independence and morally reliable behavior characteristic of all respectable people. John Stuart Mill, for example, wrote in his great textbook *Principles of Political Economy* (first published in 1848) that working people were advancing “in mental cultivation, and in the virtues dependent upon it.”

Respectability and progress thus were key mid-Victorian concepts. They arose from the middle class, but served to encourage class reconciliation. “Respectability” became a cult word in the mid-Victorian years. It implied behavior that displayed acceptance of conventional Christian morality—

independence, orderliness, cleanliness, and propriety. Anyone in any class could become respectable by individual choice. On the one hand, respectability was the means by which a commercial or industrial captain and his wife showed that they were worthy of being called a gentleman and a lady, terms that increasingly connoted a moral quality rather than the old notion of bloodlines; on the other hand, respectability was the means by which working men and women sought to claim an independent place in the social and political order. Hardly anything warmed the heart of Victorian reformers more than the sight of a respectable working-class family—sober, scrubbed, and clothed in their Sunday best, on the way to church or chapel—but such working-class respectability did not translate into working-class acceptance of the social and political status quo.

By *progress* the Victorians meant not only the increase in technology and material production of modern society, but also the perception that ever greater numbers of people were choosing respectable lifestyles. The obvious accomplishments of industry and commerce, and the fortunate turn of Britain away from revolution in favor of reform, led the British into vigorous nationalism by mid-century. Pride in their legal, constitutional, commercial, and industrial institutions led many mid-Victorians into belief in the intrinsic, even biological, excellence of what they called the British (or English) “race.” It also led the British to think that progress is automatic, that it is identical to change, and that it is a central theme in human history. Many Victorian historians celebrated progress in English history and thereby created a magnificent and useful, though somewhat inaccurate, myth of the English past. Historian H. T. Buckle (the son of a shipowner) put it best: English history, he said, is “the progress from barbarism to civilization”; indeed, “history is the living scroll of human progress.”

Progress was a concept that the better-off members of the working class could share, and many members of the *aristocracy of labor*—the skilled craftspersons—met the middle class halfway along the road to respectability. As one former Chartist said, “It is in the very nature of the intelligent and virtuous to feel self-respect, and the claims of manhood as a man.” Now that Chartism and sweeping attempts to form revolutionary national unions had failed, these working men stood ready to accept inequality of wealth, but they insisted on recognition of their equality in moral virtue and mental capacity. Working-class people realized that middle-class propagandists were trying to brainwash them, but they also accepted that capitalism and industry had arrived to stay, and that through temperance, prudence, hard

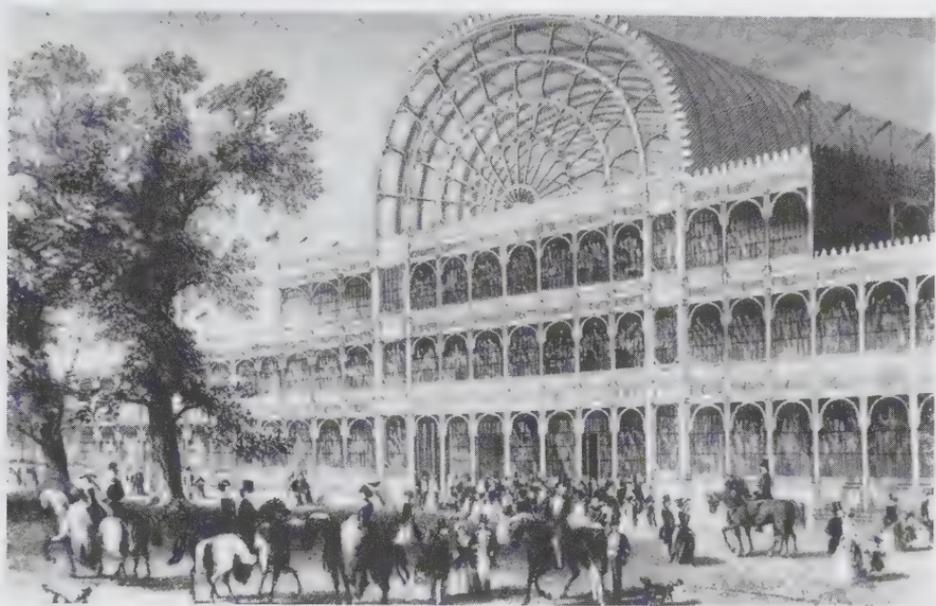
work, and self-education, the top stratum at least of the working class could improve itself. As one working man put it, through working-class organizations such as cooperative societies, workers “become independent, and feel morally as well as socially elevated.”

Once Chartism failed, the main institutions of the working class embodied efforts by working people to come to terms with capitalism and industry. First, the *friendly societies*, essentially institutions of collective thrift, that had originated within the ranks of skilled artisans now expanded. In these voluntary associations, workers joined together for the purpose of providing social security, such as unemployment, sickness, and old-age benefits. By 1872, friendly societies enrolled approximately four million members. Second, the cooperative societies evolved from utopian socialist communities into practical voluntary associations for cooperative production and shop-keeping. They were an effective way of securing a place for the traditional concern for community inside a market economy.

Finally, there were *new model trade unions*. These were not revolutionary organizations, but cautious and businesslike craft unions devoted to protecting their members within the industrial system. These unions—the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, and so on—all had relatively high subscription fees because they set unemployment benefits as a high priority. For these reasons, the craft unions of the mid-Victorian years never enrolled more than about 10 percent of adult laborers, nor did they adopt an aggressive strike strategy. Their objective was simply “a fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work,” and they succeeded because they could keep the skills of their members exclusive. Their prudent behavior slowly won not only benefits for the working-class elite, but also the approval of a section of the liberal middle class. Eventually, in the 1870s, the new model trade unions earned from Parliament legal recognition of trade unions and of peaceful methods of pursuing trade disputes.

THE CRYSTAL PALACE, 1851

The Great Exhibition of 1851 symbolized the prosperity, the faith in progress, and the social reconciliation of mid-Victorian Britain. The brain-child of Queen Victoria’s beloved husband, Prince Albert, the Great Exhibition was the first world’s fair. A tireless promoter of science and technology as well as head of the thoroughly bourgeois royal family, Albert sought to invite all nations to put on display the material evidence of the advance of



The Crystal Palace, 1851. The huge but graceful building was constructed from prefabricated iron and glass panels. It symbolized science, technology, and progress to the Victorians.

civilization and so celebrate humanity's achievements. In fact, however, the Great Exhibition celebrated *British* achievements and boosted British pride, for the exhibits in manufactures, machinery, and fine arts demonstrated Britain's industrial, commercial, and imperial preeminence. Speaking in effect for the nation, Queen Victoria wrote, "I never remember anything before that everyone was so pleased with, as is the case with this Exhibition."

The building that housed the Exhibition was one of the principal reasons for satisfaction. Known appropriately as the Crystal Palace, the exhibition hall was a perfect symbol for the age—a splendid hall over 1,800 feet long and 108 feet high at the peak of its great arched transept and made of prefabricated iron columns, girders, and glass panels. The Crystal Palace was designed by Joseph Paxton, himself a symbolic figure: formerly a gardener employed by the duke of Devonshire, Paxton by 1850 was a self-made engineer and railway director. His design—in effect a giant greenhouse—took less than a year to plan and build, yet it expressed in its beautiful functionalism the industrial miracle of the British economy. It was a cathedral devoted to material progress. (Eventually, the Crystal Palace was moved from Hyde Park to Sydenham, where it remained until fire destroyed it in 1936.)

The Crystal Palace proved to be a meeting ground for Britons of all social classes. Although the upper-class promoters of the Great Exhibition feared at first that members of the working class might cause embarrassing trouble at the Crystal Palace, the working people who came were well-behaved and respectable. Huge numbers came: more than six million tickets were sold in less than a year. Railway companies ran cheap trains for ordinary people to take day-long excursions to the Exhibition. At the Crystal Palace, working-class folk rubbed elbows amicably with the rich. Who would have thought, mused the *Times*, that such events “should have taken place not only without disorder, but also without crime.” The events of 1848 seemed to have receded into the distant past.

HIGH CULTURE OF THE VICTORIAN PERIOD

Victorian writers were a major force behind the mid-Victorian social consensus and the *meliorism* (reformism) of the ruling elite. They typically urged charity and social harmony on their middle-class readers even as they preached bourgeois values to the working class. In the mid-Victorian years, British intellectuals generally reflected the optimism of the period, not blindly or complacently, but with faith that social relations and cultural values could be improved. They were often very critical of particular institutions and attitudes—the churches, the schools, and the judicial system or the greed, the self-interest, and the utilitarianism of the commercial and industrial men—but always with the view that progress and reconciliation were possible. Not surprisingly, mid-Victorian intellectuals expressed a balance between the two great streams of thought that they inherited: the romantic and the utilitarian.

In the Victorian years, intellectuals in Britain were called *men of letters*, a term that indicated a particular kind of writer standing in a special relationship to the public. The men of letters were neither alienated intellectuals nor academic specialists. Instead, the label applied to a wide variety of writers—novelists, poets, social critics, historians, political economists, philosophers, and so on—who were tied directly to the general reading public by the sale of books and articles in a market system. Men of letters thus included writers of fiction, poets and social critics.

The audience for the men of letters exerted great influence on their work. By the early Victorian years, a general reading public buying reading matter in great quantities had replaced patronage as the means by which

writers earned their living. The lack of an educational system for the working class and the relatively high price of books and magazines limited this general reading public to the well-off. The middle class was by far the larger of the two upper classes; thus, the middle class dominated the reading public. Middle-class men and women hungered for entertainment, information, social instruction, and moral guidance. As members of a new social order, they lacked the traditional breeding that satisfied such needs among the aristocracy and gentry. They looked instead to formal education and to reading matter of all kinds—newspapers, magazines, books, manuals of etiquette, encyclopedias, and the like. Thus, the middle class created a demand for writing and called into being the men of letters.

The men of letters themselves came overwhelmingly from the middle class. Many young men—and, as we will see, women—found the opportunity to make money as writers irresistibly attractive. As novelist Anthony Trollope wrote, the profession of literature required “no capital, no special education . . . no apprenticeship.” Many of the men of letters depended wholly on the sale of their work for their livelihood, and some with great success. Dickens made a fortune on his novels, selling some of them to publishers for as much as £4,000 apiece; Trollope ascended from the ranks of the lower civil service to the status of landed gentlemen by dint of his novels, which he turned out with businesslike routine; and historian T. B. Macaulay made more than £20,000 on the third and fourth volumes alone of his monumental *History of England*. In short, a young man (or woman) of energy but no connections might make a comfortable living as a professional writer, combining in his (or her) work journalism, criticism, and fiction. This success helped keep the men of letters from becoming angry and alienated.

Their influence also worked against alienation. The Victorian men of letters were not prohibited by official censorship (except in regard to blasphemy and libel) from saying what they wanted. Further, the reading public was relatively compact and accessible, and it included nearly all the people who made Britain’s political, social, and economic decisions. The men of letters knew that serious works of fiction, history, or social criticism would reach nearly everyone who counted. Moreover, not only the market system, but also bonds of sympathy tied the men of letters to the public. Authors and their reading public understood and trusted each other. Men of letters on the whole tended to share middle-class values: order, progress, work, self-help, and a more or less orthodox Christian morality.

One result of the close bonds between serious Victorian writers and their public was that all agreed on the proper function of intellectuals. The public expected men of letters to be *useful* as entertainers, as instructors, and as moral guides to help their readers through the troublesome times of economic and social change. The Victorians felt strongly the gravity of the new problems they encountered, and they turned not only to the churches, but also to the men of letters for mental and moral help. The public in effect asked the authors to serve as teachers, preachers, and prophets—sages for a secular society. The men of letters for their part accepted this didactic function, even though they were sometimes uncomfortable with narrow utilitarian or moralistic standards for judging intellectual or artistic work. After all, this social utility gave them high status.

EXEMPLARS: CARLYLE, DICKENS, TENNYSON, AND MILL

We can see examples of the different ways of fulfilling the didactic function adopted by Victorian men of letters by looking at four important writers of the nineteenth century. For Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), perhaps the prime example of the men of letters, the way was that of the prophet. As he wrote, what England needed was a heroic “Prophet or Poet to teach us.” In a long career of rumbling and thundering, Carlyle incessantly warned Britain about what he saw as its abandonment of the spirituality and cultural coherence of medieval society for the materialism and fragmentation of modernity. Carlyle’s essays and histories (most notably *The French Revolution*, *On Heroes and Hero Worship*, *Sartor Resartus*, and *Past and Present*) arose from an unusual outlook—namely, a volcanic combination of Scottish Calvinism and German Idealist philosophy. Calvinism taught Carlyle that the world’s history is the irresistible unfolding of God’s will; from Idealism, he learned that the material world is only the clothing for the true spiritual reality. According to Carlyle, Britain’s problem was that most people, caught up as they were in a philosophy of utilitarianism and self-interest, failed to see the underlying spiritual nature of reality. Consequently, they confused means and ends, and their society lost its grounding. Yet Carlyle combined such sharp criticism of Victorian culture with an affirmation of core middle-class values. His demand for “heroes” (those who have insight into God’s will and who dare to act accordingly) accorded with the middle-class emphasis on responsibility and individual agency; more straightforwardly, his praise for work as the agency of divine purpose echoed the middle-class insistence that the effortless life was not worth living. By

the end of his life, Carlyle was known as “the sage of Chelsea,” for his message appealed to the religiosity, the seriousness, and the dutifulness of the Victorians.

One of the many men of letters deeply influenced by Carlyle’s warnings of a social catastrophe such as the French Revolution was Charles Dickens (1812–70). In a time when novels were the dominant literary form, simultaneously providing entertainment, social observation, and moral instruction, Dickens was the most imaginative of all Victorian writers of fiction. He wrote a series of sprawling best-sellers through which he established an intimate connection to his audience: *Oliver Twist*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *David Copperfield*, *Hard Times*, and *Little Dorritt*, to name only a few. In these novels, Dickens displayed an ability to be at once a great comic writer and a serious social critic and reformer. His works provided a miraculously rich panorama of portraits taken from industrial capitalist society. He did more than any other person, whether in public office or in intellectual life, to help his fellow Victorians see what was actually all around them—the suffering of the Hungry ’40s, the misery of urban life for most of the working class, the harshness of utilitarian philosophy, the blindness and hypocrisy of many middle-class people, and the need for a renewal of simple human charity and sympathy.

The reading public that consumed the fat *three-decker* (three-volume) novels by Dickens and others found in them just the kind of information and guidance that it needed. Fiction was the perfect art form for the Victorian middle class. That same audience tended to be resistant to poetry, at least poetry of all but a certain kind. Victorian readers valued poetry when it was useful to them in some way, especially in stating truths in a poignant manner or in providing moral uplift. Many poets found this situation uncomfortable. As heirs to the romantics, they naturally felt a desire to make art a refuge from the hurly-burly of industrialization, a realm of higher values such as beauty, contemplation, and spirit. Yet Victorian poets were also drawn by the urgency of social and cultural change to keep in touch with the main themes of the times and to speak to the concerns of the broad spectrum of literate people. Thus, most Victorian poets were divided as to their purpose and were profoundly concerned with defining a poetic role for themselves.

No one exemplified these tensions or found solutions more agreeable to the reading public than the greatest of the Victorian poets, Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–92), who was appointed poet laureate by Queen Victoria in 1850. Deeply affected by an unstable home life, Tennyson developed a

powerful streak of melancholy and found relief only in the discipline of writing verse. He grew up in the heyday of the romantic poets and was drawn to the romantic ideal of the isolated poetic genius. At Cambridge University in the late 1820s, however, fellow members of a secret society of undergraduate intellectuals urged Tennyson to use his poetry for the good of the nation. As his closest friend said, "Poems are good things, but flesh and blood is better." Most of Tennyson's early poetry reflects the rival attractions of poetic isolation and public teaching and takes the dilemma of writing poetry in unpoetic times as a main theme. Tennyson also read modern science, including the emerging evolutionary geology and biology, which threw doubt on conventional religious belief.

These issues came to a crisis for Tennyson in 1833, when his closest undergraduate friend and moral guide died. *In Memoriam* (1850), written by Tennyson over ten years as a verse diary of psychological recovery, raises and resolves fundamental questions: What is the use of poetry in times of great national change? Is there life after death? Can one believe in a benevolent God when the death of individuals and the struggle for survival in nature seem to prove otherwise? To all these questions, Tennyson was able to give ringing affirmative answers, but only after profound struggle. His ability to adopt a positive outlook and to affirm belief in progress attracted his readers. Without intending to, Tennyson spoke for all literate Victorians. He had learned from both science and religion, and in so doing he had forged a balance from the two rival lines of thought in the Victorian period. Such a balance was characteristic of the mid-Victorian decades.

Another great man of letters who learned from both streams of thought was John Stuart Mill (1806–73), by far the preeminent Victorian philosopher and liberal thinker. Mill labeled the two streams of nineteenth-century thought the Benthamite (empiricist, scientific, liberal) and the Coleridgean (romantic, idealist, conservative), and with characteristic fairness, he gave both credit for Victorian progress. The son of James Mill, and a close friend of Jeremy Bentham, J. S. Mill was raised as a complete utilitarian philosopher—"a logic-chopping engine," as Carlyle called him. When Mill was twenty, however, he had a nervous breakdown, which he attributed to the failure of his upbringing in developing his emotions. He turned to the romantic poets and the whole Coleridgean type of thought in order to cultivate his feelings. Thereafter, his utilitarian philosophy and liberal politics showed a flexibility and sensitivity lacking in Bentham's ideas. Mill acknowledged that mental and spiritual pleasures are higher than the physical; his

political economy advocated capitalism, but leaned toward socialist values; and his political philosophy tempered democracy with concerns about majority rule. Mill was an individualist, but he interpreted individualism in terms of maximum moral self-development. His major works—*A System of Logic*, *Principles of Political Economy*, *On Liberty*, *Representative Government*, and *Utilitarianism*—stand as a compendium of nineteenth-century liberal and empiricist philosophy.

WOMEN WRITERS IN THE VICTORIAN PERIOD

One of the most ironic facts about the Victorian “men” of letters is that so many of them were women. Especially in the genre of fiction, women writers emerged in large numbers in the Victorian period; thus, though women novelists probably remained in the minority between 1830 and 1870, writing became one of the main outlets for middle-class female talent and energy. Women did not find that becoming a professional writer was easy: not only did women lack opportunities for education, but also they were severely limited by the image of the “proper lady.” Victorians assumed that the Creator designed women for domesticity: they were supposed by nature to be protectors of morality in the home and suppliers of warmth and consolation to children and husbands. The proper lady was never to put herself forward. Yet some middle-class women had to find a way to earn income, either because they were unmarried or because the financial burdens of the family fell on them. Others simply found that they had to express their creative impulses.

Women of talent adopted striking devices to mask or compensate for the “improper” activity of writing for publication. A few, accepting the convention that women’s work was work for others, refused to accept any pay. Most went out of their way to celebrate domestic virtues and to parade antifeminist attitudes. Others adopted pseudonyms in order to hide their identity—and to get a fair hearing from the reviewers: Emily Brontë published as Ellis Bell, Charlotte Brontë as Currer Bell, and Marian Evans as George Eliot.

Despite these handicaps, some Victorian women writers achieved a literary and intellectual level at least as great as any of the males. Many literary scholars, for example, regard George Eliot (1819–80) as a writer of unparalleled intellectual power. In novels such as *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, and above all, *Middlemarch*, she painted the psychological landscape, the egoism, and the moral weaknesses of the Victorians. A thorough rationalist

and freethinker, Eliot had given up her evangelical religion but not her moral imperative, which she translated into the simple desire to help her fellow human beings: “Heaven help us! said the old religion; the new one, from its very lack of that faith, will teach us all the more to help one another.” For her, as for most Victorian novelists, realism was the necessary style of fiction because only a realistic depiction of society could supply the needed information about social structure and social relations or about new kinds of moral and intellectual problems.

The novels of Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-65) also exemplify this combination of realism with social critique and moral teaching. Gaskell wrote social novels that offered realistic and riveting portrayals of working-class life in industrial England—*Mary Barton*, for example, places the reader in the midst of Chartist-inspired tumult and trade union unrest in the booming northern industrial city of Manchester. Gaskell grew up in the still largely rural southern England but after her marriage lived in Manchester. In perhaps her greatest novel, *North and South*, she drew on her own experience of these two very different cultures as she traced the physical and emotional journey of her heroine, Margaret Hale, from Helstone, a sleepy southern village, to the grimy, growing mill town of Milton (a fictionalized version of Manchester). At first contemptuous of all she sees, Margaret learns to love the vitality of the new industrial order and the possibilities it offers for individual achievement and expression.

VICTORIAN PAINTING AND ARCHITECTURE

The visual arts of the Victorian period, dominated by the interests of the new industrial and commercial middle class, displayed the same themes of realism (or truth to nature) and moralism. In painting, the two most notable developments after Constable and Turner were *genre* painting and *the Pre-Raphaelite movement*. In genre painting, the impulse to be instructive was dominant: paintings, like narratives, told a story. William Frith (1819–1909), for instance, painted large canvases giving realistic panoramic views of society: on Derby Day, in a train station, or at the post office. With technical skill but cloying sentimentality, Augustus Egg (1816–63) painted little moral lessons, such as the value of female chastity. The Victorian cult of domesticity and the moralistic aesthetics often trapped painters in sentimentality, and this sentimentality undermined the realistic style. For example, Edwin Landseer (1802–73) made technically exact paintings of animals, but gave them human emotions.



Past and Present, Number One, by Augustus Egg (1858). This moralistic Victorian painting shows an adulterous woman being banished from her home by her husband. Note the impending collapse of the children's house of cards.

The Pre-Raphaelites—Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82), William Holman Hunt (1827–1910), and John Everett Millais (1829–96)—were self-conscious aesthetes (lovers of beauty) and rebels against the *painting-by-rules* favored by the Royal Academy. Influenced by the critic John Ruskin, they took inspiration from the Middle Ages and rejected what they regarded as the “unnatural” painting from Raphael on. Like Ruskin and other advocates of the Gothic, they believed in truth to nature, and so painted in minute, realistic detail. Yet they also sought to paint in glowing colors like a medieval manuscript and refused to use earth tones. Moreover, although they created an ideal world of medieval myth, beauty, and religiosity—plainly a rejection of industrial Britain—they also accepted the moral and narrative standards desired by the middle class. Their confusion of beauty with religiosity and their rejection of the ordinary world were important steps toward the substitution of art for religion that became characteristic of twentieth-century high culture.



The Houses of Parliament, by A. W. Pugin and Charles Barry. The most famous example of Victorian Gothic architecture; designed 1836–1837 and built 1840–1860.

In Victorian architecture, the moralistic and truth to nature impulses were not easily compatible. Because of their burgeoning wealth and expanding population, the Victorians built a huge number of structures of all kinds, but they had trouble developing an original and authentic style. In fact, the Victorians built in two different modes: one, *industrial* building, tended to be purely functional, with relatively straightforward materials and designs; the other, the obviously *architectural* building, tended to be extremely ornate, with lavish decorations drawn from some past historical epoch and endowed with heavy moral overtones.

Industrial building was not thought of as truly architectural in the day, and only later was it recognized as distinguished in its own way. Iron and brick were the cheapest building materials; thus, factories, warehouses, and dockyards were constructed on iron frames and with brick facades. Many of these were elegantly simple. Others, particularly bridges and viaducts, were strikingly innovative, for the Victorian engineers could span distances and carry weights not even the Romans could imagine. Beginning with Abraham Darby's Iron Bridge at Coalbrookdale (1780), industrial engineers built a series of amazing iron structures, including I. K. Brunel's Royal Albert Bridge at Saltash (1859), Robert Stephenson's Britannia Bridge over the Menai Strait (1850), and Sir John Fowler's Forth Bridge (1890). The greatest

example of engineering design was, as we have seen, Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace, which showed that iron pillars and frames could be graceful and beautiful as well as utilitarian.

Buildings that Victorians regarded as properly architectural imitated either the classical or the Gothic style. The best classical examples are the British Museum and the Town Hall in Leeds; the Gothic is exemplified by the Houses of Parliament, the Royal Courts of Justice (London), the Manchester Town Hall, and countless churches everywhere. Gradually, the battle of the styles was won by the Gothic, largely because the Victorians associated it with the coherent Christian culture of England's past. The leading theorists of the Gothic were A. W. Pugin and John Ruskin, both of whom were strong critics of industrial society. Pugin (1812–52), who with Charles Barry rebuilt the Houses of Parliament (1840–60), regarded the Gothic as the Christian style, harking back to an idealized hierarchical and devout society. Ruskin (1819–1900) argued that only a morally great society can produce great art; he found his ideal in the Venice of the Middle Ages. Under his influence, Victorian Gothic began to reflect the Byzantine influence on Venice, with multicolored brickwork and vivid, ornate decorations. In All Saints Church (Margaret Street, London) and Keble College (Oxford), both designed by William Butterfield, this riotous Victorian Gothic reached its peak.

Perhaps the finest of Victorian architectural achievements occurred when the industrial and Gothic styles were joined. One of the best examples of this combination was St. Pancras railway station and hotel. The station is a huge, gracefully arched iron and glass train shed, and the attached hotel is an extreme version of the Gothic, massive but with countless pointed arches, gables, and steeples. Another splendid example is the Oxford University Science Museum (1851), which has a lovely restrained exterior derived directly from Ruskin's Venetian Gothic and an exhilarating interior based on slim iron pillars vaulting up to an iron and glass roof.

THE RISE OF SCIENCE

The Oxford Science Museum is symbolic of the advent of science in nineteenth-century Britain. If natural science could penetrate the tradition-bound walls of Oxford, it could do anything. Indeed, science by any measure ascended in the 1800s to take a dominant position in the culture. By the late Victorian years, science had not only won a place in the British universities,



St. Pancras Railway Station and Hotel (1868). This splendid example of Victorian neo-Gothic architecture exemplifies Victorian confidence and exuberance.

but it had also extended its jurisdiction to almost every area of human understanding, including social behavior and cosmology. In addition, scientists had formed well-organized and aggressive institutions to put forward their claims. Fundamental scientific discoveries—in electricity, in historical geology, in organic chemistry, and in evolutionary biology—proliferated on all sides.

Yet British scientists in the first half of the century liked to complain that science in Britain was declining and that scientists abroad were better supported and thereby enabled to be more productive. Such claims were misleading. True, the prevailing ideology of *laissez-faire* restricted government support for science, and industry as yet was not so sophisticated as to require research laboratories. In other words, the free market did not by itself provide for either research in pure science or careers for scientists. British scientists without independent income found it very difficult to devote their lives to science. The great English universities, Oxford and Cambridge, devoted as they were to classics, mathematics, and theology, made small provision for science. Even the Royal Society, founded in the seventeenth century, had come under the control of aristocratic amateurs.

Nevertheless, natural science in the early 1800s already played an increasingly important part in British society and culture. Many early industrialists had taken an active interest in science, and they had based some of their technical innovations (most notably, in steam power and iron metallurgy) on scientific discoveries. The Victorian public attributed much of their industrial growth to science. In many industrial cities, scientific institutions, such as “literary and philosophical societies,” provided opportunities for business people to participate in the *march of mind* and polite scientific inquiry. Most important, scientific knowledge was regarded as part of the accepted view of the world. Early Victorians normally did not see science as opposed to religion, but as a vital source of knowledge of the will of God. The natural world was another book of revelation, and science was the key to reading it.

The fact that scientists felt left out of landed society, and especially left out of Oxford and Cambridge, gave them an urge to advance the claims of science. Their real position of strength made their claims irresistible. The scientists of the first half of the century felt very strong professional aspirations. In 1831, they had founded the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS), which satisfied some of their professional objectives but not others. Many wanted to win places for themselves and for science at Oxford and Cambridge. This urge put the scientists among the forces seeking to reform the ancient universities. They found allies, first, in the Nonconformists, who wanted to open the universities to non-Anglicans; second, in the utilitarians and other liberals, who wanted to connect the universities with industrial and commercial life; and third, in some of the younger *Oxbridge* tutors, who wanted for themselves careers within the universities as professional teachers and scholars.

Beginning in the 1850s, the reformers broke through the universities’ defenses. Parliament appointed Royal Commissions to investigate Oxford and Cambridge and then passed laws opening them to Nonconformists and endorsing “modern” courses of study, including natural science. The tutors won careers as teachers with expertise in their own fields. (In the 1870s, Nonconformists were allowed to take advanced degrees, and tutors were allowed to marry.) Under the influence of science, research became a much more important activity, and the old-style generalist approach to knowledge gave way to specialized study. New disciplines such as history, anthropology, and economics were founded, each of them on the model of science. Provincial universities began to be established in the major industrial cities—the beginnings of the University of Manchester coming first in

1851. By the late nineteenth century, then, natural science (though not industrial technology) had secured a high place for itself in British culture.

RELIGION, SCIENCE, AND THE CRISIS OF FAITH

The central place of science in Victorian culture may seem to conflict with the Victorians' intense religiosity—but most Victorians did not think so. Throughout the nineteenth century, *natural theology* and the assumption that the scientific study of nature revealed God's workings in the world remained powerful. So, too, did the churches, both Anglican and Nonconformist, in political, social, and cultural life. As historian George Kitson Clark wrote, "Probably in no other century, except the seventeenth and perhaps the twelfth, did the claims of religion occupy so large a part in the nation's life, or did men speaking in the name of religion contrive to exercise so much power."¹

This era saw Nonconformists throw off their political disabilities and impose much of their culture on the wider Victorian society. The Religious Census of 1851, which found that half of all Victorian churchgoers did not attend the established church, marked Nonconformity's triumph. At the same time, Anglo-Catholicism (also called Tractarianism) revitalized much of the Church of England with elaborate liturgies, a strong respect for the importance of aesthetic beauty in worship, and a reassuring emphasis on authority and tradition. The fervency and vitality of Victorian Christianity fueled the overseas missionary movement, a confident exercise of cultural imperialism by which British Victorians sought to extend their faith and values across the world.

Nevertheless, despite the apparent strength of Victorian Christianity, many Victorians worried deeply about what they perceived as a decline of religion. Two developments provoked much anxiety and soul-searching: the growth of urban, working-class neighborhoods that seem largely *unchurched*, and the crisis of faith among some of the educated sectors of society.

As we have seen, during the eighteenth century, the Church of England failed to maintain contact with the rapidly expanding ranks of the urban laboring poor. This problem intensified in the industrial cities of early Victorian England. Moreover, in those churches that did exist, the practice

¹G. Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England* (New York: Atheneum, 1976), 20.

of renting pews to the well-to-do led many working-class folks to conclude that church membership was simply not for their sort of people. By 1851, then, half the population of England—most of them working class—were not attending church. Of course, the fact that the working class was vastly larger than the middle and upper classes meant that the 50 percent of the population that was attending church included many workers. Indeed, during the Victorian era a greater percentage of the laboring classes attended church than at any time before or since. Nevertheless, the specter of the unchurched masses greatly alarmed middle-class Victorians, who feared a breakdown in social morality. Both the established Churches of England and Scotland and the Nonconformist denominations responded with church-building campaigns and domestic missions in the industrial cities. They failed, however, to bridge the gap between institutional Christianity and working-class culture.

Yet the existence of this gap did not mean that the British working class was anti- or even non-Christian; only a minority of working-class people embraced the politically radical and virulently anti-Christian *free thought movement*. Most workers simply did not equate “Christian” with church member or churchgoer. Instead, they defined Christianity in terms of a thoroughly pragmatic morality. Working-class Christianity was not a matter of belief, but of action, primarily the action of helping out one’s neighbor in a time of need. Victorian working-class families tended to view the churches in instrumental terms. They sent their children to Sunday school, looked to the churches for material assistance, and attended religious services, not on Sunday mornings but on occasions that had symbolic (or superstitious) meaning in working-class culture: Watch Night (New Year’s Eve), Harvest Festival, or the christening of a child.

The blend of superstition and pragmatism in working-class religiosity caused great anxiety among middle-class religious leaders; even more alarming, however, was the onset of a crisis of faith within the ranks of the upper classes. The primary precipitant of this crisis was an ethical reaction against the harshness of certain Christian teachings. Here evangelicalism was crucial because it heightened the intensity of the individual conscience and the drive for personal morality. In addition, the evangelical emphasis on good works as necessary for saintliness and the growing material capacity of the nation to do real social good created a powerful meliorism, indeed an impulse toward *perfectibilism*—the notion that people and social institutions are capable of perfection. By the 1840s and 1850s many Victorians

were finding their meliorist attitude inconsistent with orthodox doctrines of hell and everlasting punishment. Surely, they thought, a loving God could not condemn millions of souls to eternal torment. They also began to reject the orthodox doctrine of atonement, which taught that God's justice demanded death as a punishment for sin, that the sinless Jesus Christ died in the place of sinners, and thus that Jesus's crucifixion served as a blood sacrifice that atoned for the sins of believers. Increasingly, Victorians rejected this theology as barbaric, akin to the sort of "primitive" religious customs that they encountered in places such as India and Africa.

At the same time, historical criticism of the Bible led to doubts about its literal truth. From the late eighteenth century on, German scholars had applied critical methods to the study of the Bible; beginning in the 1830s these methods made their way into Britain. Slowly, this *higher criticism* undermined orthodox belief by arguing that the Christian Scriptures should be understood as the works of real men in historical circumstances. It was necessary, higher critics contended, to separate legend from historical fact and to distinguish between historical assertions and allegorical statements of belief. Such arguments were not only heretical to those who clung to the Bible as God's literal words, but they also threatened to make the Bible understandable only by a committee of academic experts.

Developments in the new science of geology exacerbated this religious crisis by challenging the traditional Christian consensus around Archbishop James Ussher's dating of the earth (according to the Biblical genealogies) at 4004 BC. As early as 1795, James Hutton disputed both the earth's age and the then-common argument that the Biblical account of an all-encompassing flood explained changes observed in the geological record. In his *Theory of the Earth, with Proofs and Illustrations*, Hutton argued that natural causes, still in operation, explained the geological and fossil evidences thus far gathered. The publication of Sir Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830–33) and Robert Chambers' *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), both arguing in favor of scientific theories of geological change that relied on natural processes occurring gradually over enormous stretches of time, strengthened the challenge that geology posed to traditional Christianity. The writer John Ruskin wrote movingly in 1851, "If only the Geologists would let me alone, I could do very well, but those dreadful Hammers! I hear the clink of them at the end of every cadence of the Bible verses."

A sense of religious crisis, then, had already enveloped much of educated society well before Charles Darwin (1809–82) published his findings regard-

ing the evolution of species. As a naturalist aboard *HMS Beagle* in the 1830s, Darwin had two convergent experiences: first, he read Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, which persuaded him that the operation of uniform natural laws must explain scientific data; second, he observed the complex distribution of natural life in South America (and particularly in the Galapagos Islands), which showed him that all creatures are specially adapted to their environment. Back in England, Darwin struggled to understand how the uniform working of natural law modified species to fit their environment. Malthus's *Essay on Population* (see chapter 12), which had shown that all living things struggle ceaselessly for limited resources, helped him find his answer.

In 1859 Darwin published his *Origin of Species*, in which he summoned a wide variety of evidence to make three points: (1) species *had* varied—they were not created in immutable forms; (2) each species had evolved from antecedent species and ultimately from one or a few forms; and (3) the mechanisms of change were *variation* and *natural selection*. Variation refers to crucial biological advantages that assist in the struggle for survival (a slightly longer neck or a curved beak) and so provides the means of natural selection, the process by which the “fittest” survive. Then in *The Descent of Man* (1871) Darwin made explicit what was implicit in the *Origin of Species*: humanity followed the same pattern of evolution as did other species.

Darwinism immediately became the subject of heated controversy. The initial reaction of many leaders in the churches was negative. At Oxford in 1860, for example, Bishop Samuel Wilberforce debated Darwinism's chief propagandist, T. H. Huxley, by asking in a supercilious tone whether Huxley claimed descent from monkeys through his grandmother or his grandfather. That kind of reaction enabled Huxley to charge Wilberforce (and by implication, all orthodox Christianity) with *obscurantism*, that is, with deliberately hindering the spread of knowledge and obscuring the facts. The debate made science seem the agent of liberty of thought and progress, and religion the agent of authoritarianism and ignorance.

Within two or three decades after 1859, however, most British theologians and ordinary believers had made their peace with Darwinism. Ironically, a widespread misunderstanding of Darwinism contributed to its acceptance. The Darwinian understanding of nature as a battlefield—“red in tooth and claw,” as Tennyson put it—threatened to knock the pillars out from under natural theology by destroying the idea that nature was “providentially designed,” that all things were created by a benevolent God according to a divine plan. Yet, because they failed to understand the

utter randomness of evolutionary adaptation, most British theologians and religious thinkers—and many scientists and scientific popularizers—argued that the process of natural selection revealed God at work in the world and so that evolutionary theory upheld rather than undermined natural theology.

This domesticated form of Darwinism proved very attractive to middle-class Victorians. It not only brought vast realms of phenomena under the grasp of the human mind, but it also provided scientific authority for many of the things that middle-class Victorians desperately wanted to be true. Natural selection and evolution seemed to justify inequality: the fittest *had* risen to the top. To middle-class Victorians, Darwinism was free enterprise biology. They understood themselves and their society to be the products of an evolutionary process designed to make the strong stronger, the best better, and the moral even more so.

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Chapter 17

The Overflow of Power:

British Empire and Foreign Policy, 1815–1870

Britain dominated the global system of international relations in the first half of the nineteenth century. Its industrial and commercial head start gave the British state preeminence in world-power relationships and made the Empire a key feature of nineteenth-century British power and diplomacy. In the decades after 1815, then, British power overflowed the shores of the British Isles and rippled out in ever larger waves to touch nearly every island and continent on earth.

BRITISH POWER AND INTERESTS

This is not to say that Britain was the same sort of buccaneering, mercantilist power as it was in the eighteenth century. Even though the British Foreign Office, diplomatic service, and imperial government remained in aristocratic hands, external policy reflected the outlook of the middle class. Peace and free trade were the predominant themes because the British knew that they could usually get their profits without force. It is true that British forces were engaged in a series of little wars almost continuously throughout the first half of Queen Victoria's reign—wars in India, China, Afghanistan, South Africa, Burma, and elsewhere. By British standards, however, these were normally little more than skirmishes; between 1815 and 1854, the British took no part in any major war.

British power was real and enormous, but it was economic, not military. Distrustful as always of a large standing army, Britain cut back on military spending after Waterloo. The army before the 1850s never numbered more than 140,000 regulars, of whom about a quarter were stationed in the

British Isles and another quarter in India. The British spent less than 2 percent of the gross national product on the army—far less than in either the eighteenth or the twentieth century. With an army this small, Britain could not think of major interventions in Europe.

British interests lay in overseas trade rather than European conquest. The British regarded the rest of the world as their market and their warehouse of raw materials. In the 1850s, Europe as a whole produced more than 50 percent of the total manufacturing output of the world. As Professor Bernard Porter has written, Britain “had more factories, consumed more coal and iron and raw cotton, and employed more men and women in manufacturing industry than the rest of Europe put together.” About 40 percent of British trade was with the Continent, but the other 60 percent was with the non-European world: North America, Asia (including India), South America, Africa, and Australia, in descending order of importance. Furthermore, as we saw in chapter 13, the British invested an increasing amount of capital abroad each year.

To protect this all-important trade, Britain had to have a navy. The British let the navy dwindle after 1815 and only built it back up in the 1850s and 1860s. Nevertheless, throughout the whole period from 1815 to 1870, no country could challenge British sea power. Indeed, the British navy was generally more powerful than the next three or four largest navies put together. Naval squadrons could be (and were) dispatched to assert British interests in the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, and the Pacific. British ships were active around the world in putting down piracy and slavery and in protecting British merchant shipping. After the adoption of ironclad, steam-powered gunboats in the 1840s, the navy could (and did) inject British powers inland by controlling rivers and coastal waters.

THE FREE TRADE EMPIRE

The British navy protected the interests of the British Empire, already in the first half of the nineteenth century by far the largest in the world and quite unlike any empire that had ever existed. Decentralized and non-mercantilist, this was an empire built on and around free trade. Recall that, in mercantilist empires, colonies exist to serve the mother country by supplying raw materials and buying its manufactured goods; thus, in such empires the colonies were prohibited from trading with other nations and from competing with the mother country. Because Britain had such an industrial and commercial advantage over the other Western nations in the

years before 1870, a mercantilist empire was no longer necessary. The British needed neither to exclude other nations from trading with British colonies nor to establish formal control over all of the territories that its commerce penetrated.

British imperial influence resulted from its industrial and commercial predominance. For this reason, it is useful to think of British overseas power in terms of *informal* as well as *formal* empire. In their informal empire, the British dominated many regions without establishing formal governmental control over them. As we have seen, the British industrial sector of the early nineteenth century established satellite economies all around the world—economies of primary producers that were dependent on Britain. Much of Central and South America, for instance, was part of Britain's informal empire, though the British directly governed only the Miskito Coast (now Belize and part of Nicaragua) and British Guiana (now Guyana). Similarly, the cotton-producing states in the southern United States were tied to Britain, and in a sense New Orleans was as much a part of the Empire as Calcutta or Montreal.

Given their economic advantage, the Victorians preferred to expand their influence without taking formal control whenever they could because it was cheaper. No soldiers or governors or judges were required. Nevertheless, the British possessed an enormous formal empire in 1815, the legacy of the age of mercantilism and of the Napoleonic Wars. This formal empire comprised variegated colonies around the world. India was the biggest, richest, and most important part of the formal Empire; it will be discussed in the next section.

The rest of the colonies formed a curious collection of territories, some having value as settlements for British emigrants, some as trading posts or naval bases, and some having no value at all. The British islands in the West Indies—Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, and many others—had once been the richest part of the Empire, but the sugar boom on which they depended faded in the nineteenth century, and their economies received a heavy blow when slavery was abolished in 1833. By mid-century the West Indies were the slums of the Empire. Canada had value as a partner in trade, supplying Britain with furs and timber in return for manufactured goods, but it was more important as a home for thousands of emigrants from the British Isles, especially Scottish clansmen fleeing the Highland Clearances and Irish peasants fleeing poverty and oppression. Australia, claimed in the 1770s by the Royal Navy, was used as a dumping ground for convicts between 1788 and 1840. When transportation of convicts to New South

Wales (the main colony in Australia) ended, more than fifty thousand convicts were working off their sentences there. The Cape Colony in South Africa was acquired in 1815 as a convenient port on the long sea route between Britain and India, and the British had other naval stations in the Indian Ocean for the same purpose. Gibraltar (1713) and Malta (1814) had been won in wars against Spain and France and were kept as naval stations to control the Mediterranean. Altogether, the British Empire in 1815 included about two million square miles and approximately twenty-five million people.

What to do with this huge formal Empire caused much discussion in the early nineteenth century, now that the mercantilist assumptions that had driven its formation no longer held sway. A few “Little Englanders,” such as free trader Richard Cobden, regarded the colonies as outdated, useless, and expensive. Cobden and his free-trade allies believed that, if the colonies were simply let go, Britain would retain their trade anyway. But a majority of the British governing elite found them useful. Strategically, the colonies provided ready-made allies for the British; economically, they offered secure harbors and naval stations essential for trade. For Benthamites like Edward Gibbon Wakefield, the colonies served as markets for British goods and as safety valves for Britain’s excess population. Indeed, emigration in the early nineteenth century was one of the few constructive social policies that won general consent. In the 1820s, the British government expended £65,000 to aid emigration, and between 1840 and 1873, the government-sponsored Colonial Emigration Committee assisted 6.5 million people to emigrate, most of them to the United States, but many to Canada and Australia.

Mainly, however, the British retained the colonies because they believed it their duty to do so. Because Britain—so the Victorians thought—was the most advanced nation on earth, the British had a responsibility to spread civilization to the less progressive peoples under their control. As one Colonial Secretary put it:

The authority of the British Crown is at this moment the most powerful instrument, under Providence, of maintaining peace and order in many extensive regions of the earth, and thereby assists in diffusing amongst millions of the human race, the blessings of Christianity and civilization.

Not surprisingly, evangelical missionaries actively worked to spread these blessings. Evangelicals in the Church of England and in the Nonconformist denominations alike established numerous missionary societies, such as the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), to support the proselytizing effort. The number of British missionaries, most of them evangeli-

icals, grew throughout the nineteenth century; by 1900 there were some ten thousand scattered through the Empire. These remarkably energetic and self-assured folk tended to ignore the virtues and complexities of native cultures, but they nevertheless injected a humanitarian note in the imperial march. Many missionaries became the sole advocates for the welfare of indigenous populations (though not of indigenous cultures), as well as tireless opponents of the slave trade.

The missionary movement helps explain why the formal British Empire expanded quite rapidly during the period from 1815 to 1870, despite the ideological preference for informal control. Missionaries brought with them western assumptions and institutions, which often destabilized traditional societies. Such instability threatened British economic interests and created momentum for political intervention and, frequently, formal political control. The empire thus expanded through a process of *creeping colonialism* that grew out of the British exaltation of free trade. The British did not insist on exclusive rights to trade within their empire or in other parts of the world, but they did believe that any country, sheikdom, or tribe ought to cooperate in the regular rules of free trade and to provide security of person and property for British merchants. When an indigenous government across the sea refused to accept trade on British terms, was unable to provide security for British commercial establishments, or insisted on collecting tribute from British merchants, then the British government was prepared to use force. Merchants, like missionaries, inevitably caused trouble with traditional societies on the imperial frontiers, and this *frontier turbulence* frequently drew the British army and navy into action and the government into exerting formal control. As Lord Palmerston, the plainspoken and patriotic prime minister, said in 1860, “It may be true that in one sense that trade ought not be enforced with cannon balls, but on the other hand trade cannot flourish without security, and that security may often be unattainable without the exhibition of physical force.”

One of the most blatant examples of the British use of force to secure adherence to free trade occurred in China. Although the imperial Chinese government restricted western trade to a few coastal ports, the British East India Company developed a lucrative commerce with China by exchanging Indian opium for Chinese tea, which it then exported to the West. Opium addiction, however, constituted an enormous social problem for the Chinese government, which repeatedly attempted to stop the opium traffic. Finally, in 1839 China’s rulers declared the sale and distribution of opium to be a capital crime and at the same time attempted to collect tribute from British

merchants. Conflict between Chinese officials and British traders followed. In 1840–42, British steam gunboats shattered the Chinese navy and a number of fortresses. This First Opium War forced the Chinese to cede Hong Kong to Britain and to open five port cities to British trade. Shanghai in effect became a British-governed city. A decade later, the Second Opium War (1856–60) forced the Chinese government to grant additional trade rights as well as to cede the Kowloon Peninsula (on the Chinese mainland across from Hong Kong) to Britain. Thus *gunboat diplomacy* forced open China to the West even as it protected the British rights to sell opium to China's addicts.

The expansionist impulses of colonists themselves also contributed to creeping colonialism. Consider the example of Canada. Beginning with several thousand Loyalists from the thirteen colonies in 1783, the population of Canada grew rapidly, reaching 350,000 in 1815 and 4 million in 1870. Led at first by fur traders and then by farmers, the Canadian people expanded into the Great Plains north of the forty-ninth parallel to the Rocky Mountains and claimed the Columbia River basin in the Pacific. These people, almost entirely of British extraction, simply pushed the Native Americans aside.

As the history of Canada shows, *internal expansionism* often involved the mistreatment or even destruction of indigenous peoples. Internal expansionism in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa followed a similar pattern. In Australia, an increasing number of free immigrants from the British Isles joined the convicts sentenced to transportation. As the New South Wales colony grew, it threw out new shoots in Victoria and Queensland and pushed inland from the southeast coast to develop extensive cattle-grazing ranches. At the same time, Edward Gibbon Wakefield sponsored partially successful colonies in South Australia and Western Australia. As the British population pushed into the interior, they came into conflict with the indigenous Australian Aborigines, a seminomadic, Stone Age people. The Aboriginal population could not resist the firearms and diseases of the settlers, and by 1860 their numbers had been reduced by two-thirds. In New Zealand, traders followed hard on the heels of whaling captains, and in the 1830s, another of Wakefield's projects brought colonists from Britain. These colonists, eager for pasturage for their sheep, fought a series of bloody wars with the indigenous Maoris between 1843 and 1872. By the end of the wars, the Maori population had been reduced by half, and its social structure and land tenure system undermined.

In South Africa, British colonists faced not only indigenous African peoples (Bushmen, Hottentots, and Bantus), but also approximately twenty-five thousand cantankerous Dutch (Boer) farmers who had settled the Cape Colony in the seventeenth century. The Boer farmers regarded themselves as a racially superior people elected by God to dominate the blacks of Africa. They held Hottentots as slaves. The British, who arrived in 1815, sought to control the Cape Colony for strategic reasons, but also sought to protect the Hottentots and control the land-hungry Boers. Reacting against British pressure, the Boers looked for fresh grazing lands to the east and north of the Cape Colony. That expansionism brought them into conflict with the Bantus, who for some time had been migrating south and west, into the path of the Boers. Finally, in 1836, thousands of Boers sought to escape British control and trekked east and north, setting up Boer republics in Natal, the Transvaal, and the Orange Free State. The British had no desire to annex territory, but found the spillover from the incessant frontier wars between Boer and Bantu intolerable. In 1843, Britain annexed Natal and then in 1848 took over the other two Boer colonies. In the 1850s, however, Britain recognized the independence of the Transvaal and Orange Free State: the Boers were, for the time being, too difficult a meal to swallow.

Meanwhile, an important development occurred in colonial government. Most of the colonies were ruled autocratically by Britain as if they were conquered territories. Theoretically under the control of the Colonial Office, these *Crown colonies* were actually run by local British governors. After the American rebellion, however, colonies with large numbers of white settlers were allowed—indeed, encouraged—to rule themselves through representative institutions. Largely because they had learned from their experience with the American colonies that the old adversarial relationship between colonial governors and their legislatures did not work, the British developed over time a new system of *responsible government*. By this system, the local executive became responsible to the colonial legislature and not to the governor, who increasingly played the role of constitutional monarch in his colony.

The initial development of responsible government occurred in Canada. In 1791, to keep the French and British colonists apart, the British created Upper and Lower Canada. Governed as they were by the old autocratic system, neither province succeeded, and in 1837 rebellions broke out in both provinces. The Whig government then sent Lord Durham, a radical aristocrat who believed in responsible government, to Canada to solve the

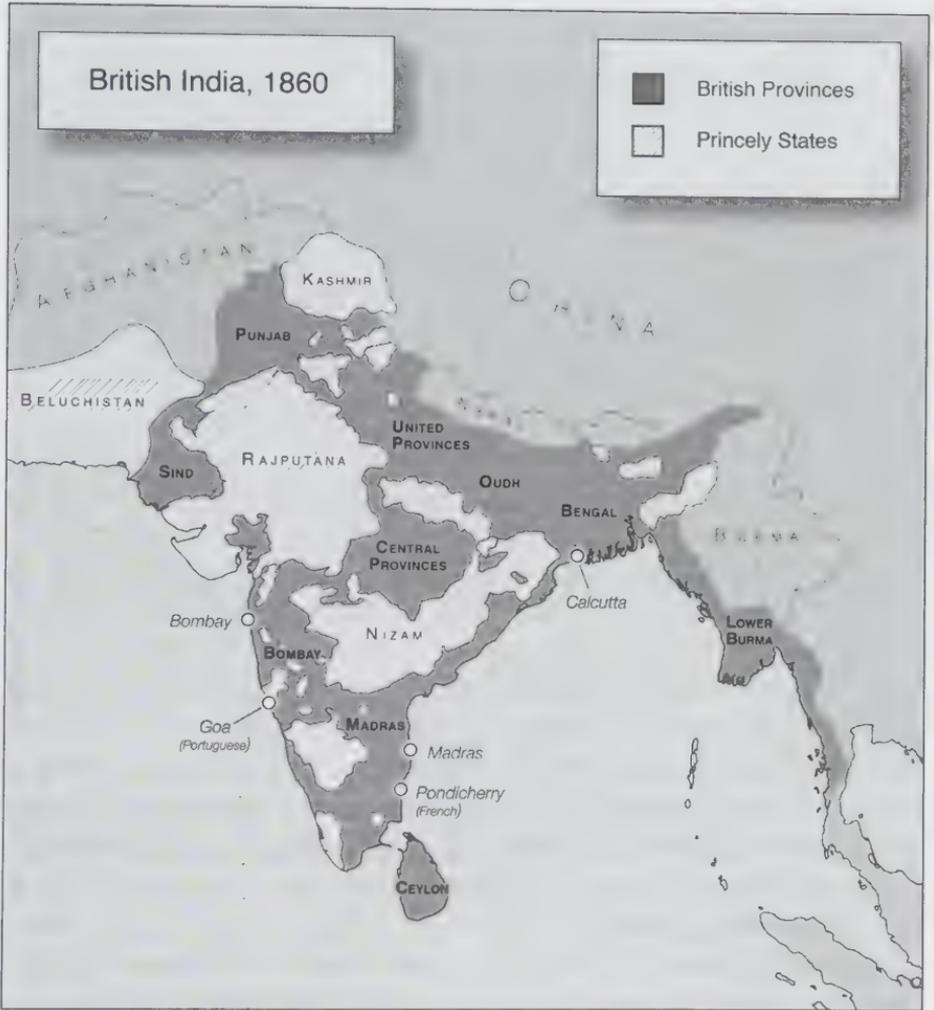
problems. In 1839, Durham submitted an extremely influential report, which called for the union of Upper and Lower Canada (in which the French colonists would be outnumbered) and for the establishment of cabinet government, according to which the colonial executive would be responsible to the colonial legislature. Upper and Lower Canada were joined in 1840, and responsible government was established in 1848.

Responsible government was government as cheap as possible for Britain and thus in many ways represented the free trade empire in its ideal form. Not surprisingly, then, responsible government was extended to other colonies as soon as their British (white) population had grown large enough to fend for itself. The Australian colonies received responsible government in the 1850s, and New Zealand in 1856. Jamaica and the other West Indian colonies never developed responsible government because the white population was so much smaller than the population of ex-slaves; indeed, they reverted back to Crown colony status. In South Africa, the settlers in Cape Colony were finally persuaded in 1872 to accept responsible government, including responsibility for paying for the wars against the Bantus.

THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN: INDIA

India was the most highly valued part of the Victorian Empire, the jewel in the imperial crown. As the cotton mills of Lancashire began to export textiles to clothe millions of Indian peasants, trade with India became increasingly important to the British economy. India was most valuable, however, because its army made Britain a great power in Asia. The Indian army epitomized the mid-Victorian imperialist ideal: it gave power for very little expenditure. Numbering about two hundred thousand men, including the British officers and a few British regiments, the Indian army was larger than the regular army of Britain, yet it was entirely paid for by Indian taxes. The British administration in India, which remained in the hands of the East India Company until 1858, was largely a tax-collecting institution. It collected the taxes by which the Indian masses paid for their own subjection.

This strange situation had come about as the East India Company flowed into the power vacuum left by the collapse of the old Moghul Empire. By the 1790s, as we saw in chapter 7, the Company ruled Bengal and was one of the half-dozen strongest powers in India. For a time, the Company focused on trade rather than territorial expansion. But beginning in 1798, when Richard Wellesley (the brother of the duke of Wellington) became governor-general, the Company adopted an aggressive policy.



The British in India, 1860. As the map shows, Britain did not govern all of India directly. However, the rulers of the princely states knew that, if they wished to retain their wealth and power, they should heed their British “advisors.”

Wellesley wanted to stop certain Indian states from allying with the French and to secure the Company’s trade and property by imposing political order in the territories surrounding the Company’s holdings. Long after the French threat was gone, Wellesley and his successors inexorably extended British rule and influence to reduce turbulence on the Company’s frontiers. Some large states in southern India fell first, followed by several of the Maratha states in central India. By 1805, the Company controlled Delhi and the Moghul emperor himself. By 1813, when the Company’s charter came up for renewal, it was in fact the paramount political power in India. The

British government recognized the Company's true function by ending its commercial monopoly in India, except for the lucrative opium trade with China.

The final wave of British expansion in India began in 1839. By then, only the Punjab, the Sind, and Afghanistan in the northwest of the subcontinent were truly independent states. The British government was concerned about Russian expansion into the area through Persia and Afghanistan. To preempt Russian designs on India, the British deposed the Afghan rulers and put their own favorite on the throne. The fiercely independent Afghans revolted, and in a furious war from 1839 to 1842 fought the British to a stalemate. In 1845, however, the British annexed the Sind and so controlled the route into Afghanistan. Sir Charles Napier expressed the British role with disarming honesty: "We have no right to seize Sind, but we shall do so, and a very advantageous, useful, humane piece of rascality it will be." During the 1840s, the British also managed to subdue the warlike Sikh state of Punjab (now Pakistan).

Burma was taken in two gulps (1823–26 and 1852). Thereafter, the British annexed a number of Indian states. Whenever an Indian prince died without a legitimate heir, the British could, by the *doctrine of lapse*, annex the state; they did this a number of times under the governor-generalcy of Lord Dalhousie. The British under Dalhousie also claimed the right to annex a state if they regarded it as badly governed. By this privilege of *paramountcy*, the British in 1856 annexed Oudh, the last big independent Muslim state in northern India.

As British power in India grew, so did the British inclination to reform traditional Indian customs and social structure. In the previous century, the Company had been content to leave Indian society and institutions alone; it even prohibited Christian missionaries from working in British India. The British desire to westernize India became irresistible, however, as the moral foundations of Victorianism hardened. Evangelicals saw magnificent opportunities for gaining converts in the subcontinent and lobbied hard to be allowed in. They won entry in 1813. Over the next decades, the increasingly confident British endeavored to remake Indian culture along British lines. Thus, they banned both the Indian custom of *sati* (suttee), whereby a Hindu widow was supposed to burn herself on her husband's funeral pyre, and *thuggee*, a ritual robbery and murder cult.

In addition, the British replaced Delhi with Calcutta as the capital of India, deposed the Moghul emperor, introduced new Westernized civil and criminal law codes, and imposed a British-style land system, complete with



An imperial scene: blowing sepoy mutineers from the muzzles of cannons. Indian Mutiny, 1857.

individual ownership and a free market in land. They also set up a new educational system, including university-level education in Western science and literature. This educational system created a new Westernized ruling elite; it also confirmed English as the official language for the country.

The new Western-style elite never won the allegiance of the mass of Indians, and the Indian people deeply resented many of the other reforms. In 1857 a violent reaction changed the tone and texture of British India. This outburst, the Indian Mutiny of 1857–58 (also called the Sepoy or Indian Rebellion), proved to be a traumatic event for the British because it threatened to smash the jewel in the imperial crown, because it shook Victorian self-assurance, and because it unleashed demons of racial hatred that could never be penned up again. The mutiny—regarded by many Indians as the first war of Indian national liberation—began among Indian troops (sepoys) near Delhi. Their British officers issued them cartridges that were greased with beef and pork fat and so insulted the religious sensibilities of both the Hindu sepoys, who regarded cows as sacred, and the Muslims, who thought pigs unclean. The mutineers killed their officers and took Delhi; thereafter, mutinies and civilian rebellions broke out in perhaps one-fifth of India, mostly in the central and northern regions.

The mutiny/rebellion was finally put down, but only after strenuous efforts by the British and loyal Indian troops amid scenes of appalling bloodshed. Mutineers slaughtered all the Europeans they could find, and the British responded with savage counterattacks and brutal retributions. Fortunately for the British, the rebels never had a concerted plan, and most of the sepoys in Bengal remained loyal. The British governor-general was also able to deploy British regular regiments to retake Delhi and the other rebel strongholds. After eighteen months, it was all over, but British India, which lasted until 1947, was never the same.

In the aftermath of the mutiny, the British had to reconsider their role in India. They recognized that the rebellion had been a reaction against British interference with India's traditional customs, institutions, and rulers. After 1858, the British, therefore, became much more conservative in propounding westernizing reforms. Strict controls limited Christian missionary activity and British policy shifted to favor traditional princely rulers and great landowners over the new westernized elite. The British now directed progress toward material development—railways above all, but also irrigation systems, roads, and public works. By 1881, India had almost ten thousand miles of railways and thirty million acres of irrigated land.

The mutiny also pushed the British government to take the rule of India away from the East India Company and put it under the British cabinet and Parliament. The governor-general now became *viceroi*, responsible in theory to a cabinet officer—the secretary of state for India—who was in turn responsible to Parliament. The Indian Civil Service, long a professional service that was exclusively British, now formally became British government employees. The Indian army was also reorganized, with a higher proportion of British troops—roughly 60,000 British soldiers and 120,000 Indians. As the British in India—the Anglo-Indians—increasingly brought wives and families out to India, they became more and more a self-conscious, provincial clique that ruled the 200 million Indians in a spirit of aloof, racially inflected elitism.

AN IMPERIAL CULTURE?

How much did India, and the expanding empire in general, mean to ordinary British men and women before 1870? Clearly, British politicians and policymakers regarded the Empire as crucial to British prosperity and security. Moreover, as more and more colonial goods such as products of native crafts, foodstuffs not grown in Europe, and raw materials for British

manufactures penetrated the British market, they altered day-to-day living and expectations. For example, the modern game of lawn tennis is very much the byproduct of mid-Victorian imperialism. Tennis needs tennis balls, and the British Empire guaranteed ready access to India rubber, a latex produced in the tropics and the core material of the first modern tennis balls. The world's first tennis club opened in Leamington Spa in the south of England in 1874; the Wimbledon Championships began three years later. Golf, too, is linked to empire: The invention of *gutta percha* from a latex drawn from Malayan trees made it possible to produce golf balls cheaply and led to a golfing boom in the second half of the nineteenth century.

But did the use of imperial products translate into imperial *consciousness* and an imperial *culture*? Should the mid-Victorian merchant happily driving his gutta percha golf ball down the fairway be considered an imperialist? And what about that merchant's cook? How aware was she of the many links to empire in her kitchen? How imperialist was her culture? Historians disagree about the extent to which imperial ideas and attitudes permeated British culture, and particularly popular culture, between 1815 and 1870.

It seems clear that, among the middle and upper classes, the definition of *Britishness* had become substantially imperial by this era. By providing access to essential raw materials and markets, the Empire underlay much of middle-class prosperity and opportunity. But perhaps just as importantly, Britain's imperial expansion underlay much of middle-class national pride. It revealed not only Britain's economic but also its moral strength. Imbued with *providentialism*—the belief that God guided human history for the working out of his will in the world—middle-class men and women saw the Empire as a visible sign and consequence of the righteousness of Victorian values. On a more pragmatic level, imperial service offered middle-class families a fast track to higher living standards: In India, for example, a middle-class family could live like the landed elite at home.

The responses and attitudes of ordinary men and women to mid-Victorian Empire remain somewhat opaque. The soldiers and sailors who extended Britain's imperial boundaries came largely from the working classes, but poverty rather than patriotism impelled most of these men into national uniform. Certainly by the mid-nineteenth century Victorians of all classes encountered various goods and expressions of Empire at almost every turn. The quintessential English cup of tea was, as we have seen, steeped in Empire, as was the fight to abolish slavery. Museums and exhibitions, beginning with the Crystal Palace of 1851, increasingly put

imperial products on display. The evangelical emphasis on overseas missionary work led to a proliferation of literature about “primitive” peoples and places. Likewise, commercial panoramas, melodramas, music hall productions, and popular publications often turned to the Empire for colorful characters and a splash of exoticism, as well as for stirring narratives of exploration, adventure, and military conquest. Yet the ordinary working Briton’s preoccupation with the day-by-day economic struggle, as well as the limits imposed by low levels of literacy, constricted the flow of imperialist culture downward from the ruling classes.

FOREIGN POLICY UNDER CASTLEREAGH AND CANNING

The other side of Britain’s imperial power was the fact that, regarding Europe, Britain was a satiated state. Protected from Europe by the navy’s control of the English Channel and the North Sea and preoccupied with economic growth, Britain had no aggressive ambitions on the Continent. British public opinion often expressed sympathy for liberalism and constitutionalism wherever they emerged in Europe, but the British were in no mood to go to war over ideology. The one overriding British interest in Europe was to keep the Continent from being dominated by one power. Such a condition would threaten Britain economically and strategically. Hence, the British, as in the eighteenth century, pursued a balance of power in Europe. The British of the nineteenth century differed from their predecessors, however, in practicing balance of power tactics without committing themselves to alliances. They preferred *splendid isolation*. Technically the policy of avoiding treaties that specified the conditions under which Britain would go to war, splendid isolation also describes British policymakers’ preference for the flexibility of independent action, whereby they could shift their influence as the states of Europe grouped and regrouped. Such a strategy, though it seemed to follow no principles, gave consistency to British policy through a succession of governments and foreign secretaries.

British foreign policy in the years between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the 1830s lay largely in the hands of two men who loathed each other: Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh (foreign secretary from 1812 to 1822) and George Canning (foreign secretary from 1822 to 1827). Serving together in the duke of Portland’s government between 1807 and 1809 (Castlereagh as secretary of war, Canning as foreign secretary), the two men disagreed so sharply on the conduct of the war that Canning conspired to

have Castlereagh removed from office and Castlereagh responded by challenging Canning to a duel—and shooting him in the thigh. Not surprisingly, this unsavory episode created a permanent rift between these two ambitious politicians.

Personality and background also divided the two men. Both came from Ireland's Protestant Ascendancy, but there the similarities ended. Castlereagh (1769–1822), who grew up in luxury and privilege, was icy and secretive, a poor orator, and wary of public opinion. Viewed as a reactionary, he was not a popular figure. In the poem "The Mask of Anarchy," for example, Shelley depicted Castlereagh tossing human hearts to bloodhounds. In contrast, Canning (1770–1827) could charm crowds with his speeches, had a flair for what we now call public relations, and was seen as a liberal in his approach to foreign affairs. Unlike his rival, Canning grew up in relative poverty: His father, disinherited for marrying a fortuneless woman, died while Canning was still a child and his mother took to the stage to support her young son, a scandalous step in an era when actresses were considered to be jumped-up prostitutes.

Despite these differences in upbringing, personality, and public image, however, both men pursued the same goal: maintaining a balance of power in Europe and thus creating a stable climate for British trade. Castlereagh had hoped to achieve this goal by holding periodic congresses of the great powers (*the Concert of Europe*), but the movement of the other states toward a general commitment to intervene on behalf of autocracy warned him off. Britain, therefore, did not join the reactionary governments of Russia, Prussia, and Austria in the *Holy Alliance* that sought to preserve autocratic regimes across Europe by active intervention.

In 1822 Castlereagh killed himself and Canning became foreign secretary. The new foreign secretary followed the same general policies as his predecessor, but with a flair for public relations that made him seem much more liberal. For example, when French troops intervened in Spain in 1823 to put down the newly installed liberal regime, Canning responded by encouraging the independence of Spain's colonies in America—but less because of an ideological commitment to liberalism than as a way to ensure that France did not gain too much power: "I resolved that, if France had Spain, it should not be 'Spain with the Indies.' I called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old." Moreover, with Spain removed and France blocked, Britain was now positioned to dominate Latin American trade.

The interlocked goals of pursuing the European balance of power and protecting British economic interests also shaped Canning's approach to southeastern Europe, where the specter of Russian expansion loomed large. British diplomats and imperial governors feared that Russia might damage British interests in the eastern Mediterranean by controlling the Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. The British regarded the Ottoman Empire as the dam that blocked the flow of Russian power into the Mediterranean. Making sure that dam remained in place was, therefore, essential. This helps explain why, when Greek patriots revolted in the 1820s against their Ottoman rulers, Canning did not fully support the rebellion.

British sympathy was all for the Greeks; the Romantic hero Lord Byron even fought and died for the cause of Greek independence. Canning, however, feared that Greek independence could lead to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. He thus sought to win for the Greeks not outright independence, but rather some autonomy under reformed Ottoman rule. His plan failed when the Ottoman government refused British mediation and proved resistant to British bullying—including the destruction of the



Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire, 1856. Limiting the spread of Russian power southward and propping up the Ottoman Empire were key goals of British foreign policy throughout much of the nineteenth century.

Ottoman navy by a combined British, French, and Russian fleet at the Battle of Navarino in 1827 (the last major naval engagement fought entirely with sailing ships). In 1830, Greece became independent. The Ottoman Empire did not collapse, but the loss of Greece marked an important step in the slow dwindling of its power.

FOREIGN POLICY UNDER PALMERSTON

The third great foreign secretary of nineteenth-century Britain was Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston (1784–1865), who dominated British foreign affairs for nearly thirty years (foreign secretary 1830–34, 1835–41, and 1846–51; prime minister, 1855–58 and 1859–65). Palmerston shared Canning's talent for appealing to public opinion and outdid him in manipulating the press, but in his diplomatic dealings he was notoriously impatient and abrasive—so abrasive, in fact, that his nickname was “Lord Pumicestone.” A roguish aristocrat, Palmerston nevertheless made himself the spokesman of the self-confident and brassy British middle class. Above all, he was a patriot and an opportunist. As a Whig, Palmerston regarded the Reform Act of 1832 as the best possible constitution for Britain and often spoke in favor of liberal regimes abroad: “I consider the constitutional states to be the natural allies of this country. . . . No English ministry will be performing its duty if it is inattentive to their interests.” Yet Palmerston in fact was a pragmatist and never sacrificed British strategic or commercial interests for ideology.

Palmerston's diplomatic style and intentions can be seen in the three main foreign areas. First, in 1830, liberal revolutions broke out across Western Europe. Palmerston enthusiastically greeted the French Revolution of 1830 and its new constitutional monarchy. But he resisted the expansion of France's new regime into the Low Countries, where British trade interests were vital. In 1830, the Belgians revolted against the Dutch, to whom they had been joined in 1815. This revolt seemed to open the way for French intervention. Palmerston achieved his goal of keeping the ports of the Low Countries open to British trade by sponsoring Belgian independence, achieved finally in 1839.

Second, in the years from 1839 to 1841, Palmerston came to the support of the Ottoman Empire, even though his action caused a rift with the French. The French backed Mehemet Ali, the ruler of Egypt, when he rebelled against Ottoman control. Like Canning, Palmerston feared that, if the Ottoman Empire collapsed, the Russian Empire would flow into the

vacuum. He managed to bring about an agreement with the Austrians and Russians against Mehemet Ali, the defeat of Ali's forces, and the bombardment of Beirut. In 1841, Palmerston got all the interested powers (including the Turks and Russians) to sign the Convention of the Straits, which declared that the straits between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean would be closed to foreign warships as long as the Ottoman Empire was at peace. Hence, he blocked Russian naval influence in the eastern Mediterranean and protected British economic and military interests.

Finally, during the European revolutions of 1848, Palmerston publicly approved of the liberal-nationalist revolutionaries, but did little to support them. His policy seemed anti-Austrian, especially when he encouraged the Italian independence and unification movement. Actually, however, Palmerston wanted to maintain the balance of power under the new conditions, and that goal required the continued existence of a strong Austria. Palmerston simply believed that the Austrian Empire would be stronger without the recalcitrant Italian provinces. Thus, he accepted Austrian suppression of the revolt in Hungary, even though he publicly criticized its brutality. Palmerston was independent and vocal—these qualities got him dismissed from office in 1851—but he was a pragmatic agent of British interests all the same.

THE CRIMEAN WAR

Several key concerns of the British converged in the 1850s to lead Britain into its only European war between 1853 and 1856. The British concern for the security of India and for the route to India through the Mediterranean and the Middle East had committed them to the defense of the Ottoman Empire, chronically the “sick man of Europe.” At the same time, the traditional British concern about the balance of power in Europe made the British statesmen and public opinion alike highly suspicious of the Russian Empire, which seemed potentially the dominant power on the Continent. The British believed, as we have seen, that the Ottoman Empire stood as a bulwark against Russian expansion into both eastern Europe and Asia Minor. Unfortunately for the British, the Ottoman Empire was a tottering dinosaur, whose weakness was a constant temptation to the Russians and an anxiety to the British. By the 1850s, the menace to Turkey by the Russian bear was rousing the British lion to fight.

In this awakening of British belligerence, another Victorian theme had strong influence: British self-confidence. By the 1850s, Britain's prosperity

and progress had bred a pride in British “civilization” that swelled easily into bumptious nationalism. Palmerston had given voice to this attitude in 1850, when, in defense of a British citizen in Athens, he declared that, “as the Roman in days of old had held himself free from indignity when he could say *civis Romanus sum* [I am a Roman citizen], so also a British subject, in whatever land he may be, shall feel confident that the watchful eye and the strong arm of England will protect him against injustice and wrong.” This arrogant British pride by the 1850s was directed at the Russian Empire, for in the eyes of the liberal Victorian middle class the tsarist state stood as the very symbol of oppression and reaction.

The tsarist regime in fact had brought some of British Russophobia on itself. The Russian army of eight hundred thousand men was much larger than any other in nineteenth-century Europe. Tsar Alexander I (r. 1777–1825) had dreamed up the reactionary Holy Alliance of 1815, and Tsar Nicholas I (r. 1825–55) was an aggressive autocrat. His armies had put down with great brutality the revolutions of 1848 in Poland and Hungary. Moreover, although the Russians did not seek to destroy Turkey, they were certainly pleased to pick up some pieces as it destroyed itself. By 1853, Nicholas I believed the time had come to carve up the Ottoman Empire. In that year, the Russians claimed the status of protectors of Christians living in the Ottoman Empire and then occupied two of its Danubian provinces. In October 1853, the Turks went to war with Russia.

The British government dithered during the events leading to the Russo-Turkish war and then stumbled into hostilities on the side of the Turks. The government, headed by Lord Aberdeen, could not face down popular enthusiasm for war, nor could it force the Turks to give in to Russian demands. As Aberdeen frequently and pathetically noted, “We are drifting helplessly to war.” After reaching an alliance with the French, who had their own grievances with the Russian Empire, as well as a need for a dose of *la gloire*, Britain went to war in March of 1854.

The ineptitude of British diplomacy leading up to the war was exceeded by the incompetence of their war effort. The Crimean War was a throwback to eighteenth-century wars of maneuver: the British did not mean to conquer Russia or overthrow the tsarist regime, but to punish the Russians enough to exact concessions from them. The specific target in the Crimea was the Russian naval base on the Black Sea, Sebastopol, to which the British and French laid siege. The besieging armies were themselves pressured by the massive, if ill-armed and ill-trained, Russian forces that descended on them from the north.

Furthermore, the British army was still operating on aristocratic lines left over from the Napoleonic wars. During the long peace after 1815, the army had ossified. Its logistical arm proved incapable of supplying the initial expeditionary force of thirty thousand men some four thousand miles from Britain. Many supply ships were destroyed by a storm in the fall of 1854, leaving the British troops to suffer horribly from a lack of food, warm clothing, and dry shelter in the winter of 1854–55. Thousands died of cholera and dysentery, medical care being backward and haphazard at best. The army bureaucracy was so impenetrable that it took a superhuman effort by Florence Nightingale, the self-appointed autocrat of nursing, to improve the army hospital at Scutari (across the Bosphorus Strait from Constantinople).

To make matters worse, the military leadership was spectacularly inept. The commander of the expeditionary army, Lord Raglan, had fought at Waterloo but had never commanded troops in the field. A staff officer to the core, Raglan issued orders in terms of requests and habitually spoke of the enemy as “the French.” His ranking officers held their commissions by purchase rather than by merit. Two of them, Lord Cardigan (commander of the Light Brigade of cavalry) and Lord Lucan (commander of the Heavy Brigade) were brothers-in-law who had long engaged in a personal feud and who now distinguished themselves as arrogant nitwits. Their aristocratic stupidity resulted in the most glorious event of the war, the magnificent but futile Charge of the Light Brigade directly into the Russian artillery at Balaclava. Lord Cardigan survived the charge, but his brigade was destroyed.

The incompetence of the war effort roused a frenzy of frustrated nationalism at home. The leading newspapers were vehemently anti-Russian and pro-Turk. The *Times's* correspondent in Crimea, W. H. Russell, sent home by telegraph (a first in the history of war) vivid reports of the army's bungling. Radical politicians blamed aristocratic government for the inefficiency of the war effort; obviously, they thought, Britain's businessmen could run the war better. Pacifist radicals like John Bright and Richard Cobden were scorned by public opinion, whereas war-hawk radicals like J. A. Roebuck became wildly popular. Palmerston emerged as the people's choice to reinvigorate the war effort, which public opinion demanded of the Aberdeen government. In 1855, Roebuck carried in the House of Commons a motion calling for an inquiry into the conduct of the war. The cabinet resigned, and Palmerston formed a government.

Palmerston displayed his usual energy and decisiveness, but in fact the Franco-British forces had already turned the corner in the Crimea. The logistical and medical branches in the Crimea became effective and supplies



Roger Fenton, The Shadow of the Valley of Death (1854). Sent to photograph the Crimean War for the Illustrated London News, Roger Fenton was one of the first war photographers. This image of cannonballs on a road after a battle was widely associated with the ill-fated Charge of the Light Brigade, although in fact it shows a smaller valley several miles to the southwest. In an earlier Fenton photograph of the same scene, no cannonballs litter the roadway; some historians conclude that Fenton altered the scene to enhance the emotional impact of the image.

flowed ashore. At home the War Office was reorganized. The Russian army showed the effects of its own antiquated systems of supply, training, and weaponry. Sebastapol fell in September 1855, bringing an end to the fighting. The Treaty of Paris (1856) gave the British what the diplomats (if not the public) had sought: a Russian guarantee of Turkish independence, autonomy for the Danubian provinces (later to become Rumania), an end to Russian claims to be protectors of Christians under Ottoman rule, and neutralization of the Black Sea. These results meant that the Eastern Question—the interlocking problems of Ottoman decline and Russian expansion—was put on the back burner for twenty years.

The Crimean War also had important results for the British military. The experience of the war forced the British public to accept a larger standing army, whose numbers now rose to about 225,000 men. This army gradually

began to mirror Victorian social values. The reform of the military services begun during the war continued. Ability and merit slowly replaced connection and wealth as the means for advancement in the army and finally, in 1871, the purchase system itself was abolished. Merit, not birth, would determine military rank. In the navy, the main changes were technological, as armored ships, breech-loading cannons, and steam power replaced the old wood-and-sail fleets in the 1860s.

Perhaps the most important result of the Crimean War was the damage it wrought to British prestige and influence in Europe. Britain thus played no significant role in the great dramas of Italian and German reunification, which redrew the map of Europe in the 1850s and 1860s. In the case of Italy, the British were torn between sympathy for Italian nationalism, the commitment to keep the Austrian Empire strong as part of the balance of power, and the belief that Austria would be better off without its troublesome holdings in Italy. In the case of Germany, the British were caught unaware, for in focusing on Austria, they failed to notice the effectiveness of Bismarck's campaign to unify Germany around the steel core of Prussian power. The British stood by in their splendid isolation when Prussia defeated Austria in 1866 and France in 1870–71, and a new and powerful united Germany was born.

By 1870, then, the British stood in a paradox: Tremendously prosperous at home and economically powerful abroad, Britain formally and informally had a gigantic empire, but was standoffish and ineffectual on the Continent. It may be that these apparently contradictory facts were actually mutually reinforcing. In any case, the policy of splendid isolation, which had enabled Britain to play the role of independent makeweight in the balance scales of European power, now was beginning to look less splendid and more isolated. British confidence, so characteristic of the mid-Victorian decades, became more dependent on possession and expansion of the Empire. The question for the decades to come would be whether the Empire would continue to be, or seem to be, a source of strength, or whether it would become a source of foreign rivalry and a drain on British resources.

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Part **IV**

**The Decline
of Victorian
Britain**

1870–1914

Chapter 18

Upheaval in Economy and Society, 1870–1914

In the years between 1870 and 1914, the foundations of Victorian culture were seriously eroded so that the whole structure was toppled by the First World War. Although the late-Victorian period (1870–1901) gave way to the Edwardian period (1901–14), which took its name from Victoria's eldest son and successor, Edward VII, long-run trends tied the whole together. These were the years when Britain's economy began to descend from the heights of world preeminence, when social change again intensified class antagonism, when Victorian confidence turned to uncertainty and anxiety, and when intellectual rebellion began to create modernism from the scattered pieces of the Victorian mind. No one factor caused the changes in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain, but just as industrial and agricultural change altered the face of Britain in the years from 1760 to 1840, so economic and social difficulties in the period from 1870 to 1914 helped mold a new social and cultural order.

Between 1870 and 1914, British economic growth began to falter, and foreign rivals started to catch up and even in some areas pull ahead. The mood of expansive confidence characteristic of the upper classes in the mid-Victorian period slowly evaporated and was replaced by one of anxiety and concern. The relative social peace of the 1850s and 1860s consequently degenerated into class conflict. To be sure, Britain remained a great economic power in 1914. Many a British businessman could sit down every morning to his breakfast and newspaper with pride in his company's profits and his country's successes. Many others, however, could hardly bring themselves to read the morning's paper, for fear of finding news of declining profits; of a strike in a vital industry; of a heated political stalemate; or worse yet, of another trade in which German producers now outpaced the British.

AGRICULTURAL DEPRESSION IN ENGLAND AND WALES

For British landowners and tenant farmers, the late-Victorian period was a time of serious economic crisis and significant structural change. Cereal (mainly wheat) farming sharply declined in the Midlands and South of England—long the grain belt of the nation and the seat of the landed elite's political and social prestige. Two developments caused this decline: first, a series of exceptionally cold and wet winters in the latter 1870s, and second, the collapse of grain prices in Britain. The former cause was short term and its impact eventually disappeared, but the price collapse had effects that lasted through the 1930s.

What happened was that cheap foreign wheat flooded the British market from the 1870s on. Vast plains were brought under the plow in the United States, Canada, Argentina, and Australia after the 1860s. Railways and steamships made exportation of wheat from these newly productive areas very cheap. By the 1880s, in economic terms, Chicago was as close to London as a Midlands estate. Because the Com Laws had been repealed in 1846, there was nothing to discourage wheat imports. Such imports doubled between 1870 and 1890, and the prices that British cereal farmers earned for their crops fell drastically; by 1900, the price of wheat in Britain had fallen by 50 percent. Livestock farmers fared better, but from the 1880s, refrigerated ships made it possible to export to Britain beef from Argentina and lamb from New Zealand. By 1900, more than one-third of the meat consumed in Britain came from abroad.

As prices for cereals fell, the traditional tenant farmers of the Midlands and southern counties were hard pressed. Some farmers diversified, others scrimped on maintenance of fields and farm buildings, and some received rent abatements from their landlords. Many tenants, however, could not survive the crisis. By 1900, numerous tenancies stood vacant. Approximately 340,000 agricultural laborers left rural life for urban occupations or overseas.

The landlords themselves now found it hard to sustain their luxurious style of life. Many discovered that their incomes were cut in half as rent-rolls declined, yet their cost of living remained high. Late-Victorian landlords typically sought outside income by investing in business and industry; by 1890 any self-respecting bank or railway could boast of several titled nobles on its board of directors. At the same time, many landlords retrenched by cutting back on household staff, by closing a house in town or in the country, or by entertaining less lavishly. In 1870, for example, the earl of Verulam's family drank 590 bottles of sherry and 250 of brandy, but in 1880, they consumed a mere 298 of sherry and 75 of brandy!

In Wales, the agricultural depression worsened landlord-tenant relationships that were already significantly more hostile than those in England. The ownership of land in nineteenth-century Wales was heavily concentrated: In the 1870s, about 570 families owned 60 percent of the land; very little tilled land was owned by the people who occupied and farmed it. Until the 1880s, a few great landed families—the Wynns, the Vaughns, the Butes, and others—dominated Welsh society and politics. Highly anglicized in taste and interests, as well as Anglican in religion, these aristocratic and gentry families stood apart from their solidly Nonconformist tenants and farm laborers. As agricultural depression worked severe hardship on these tenants, anti-landlord sentiment became an enduring theme in Welsh popular politics and culture.

LAND WARS IN IRELAND AND THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS

As in Wales, the agricultural depression exacerbated longstanding landlord-tenant hostilities in Ireland and the Scottish Highlands, but in these regions, rural unrest proved strong enough to force the British government to enact significant land reform legislation. We will take the case of Ireland first.

The sharp drop in agricultural prices hit Irish tenant farmers particularly hard because of the inflexibility of Irish rental agreements: farmers found they could not pay rent at the rates arranged in more prosperous times, but many landlords, mortgaged to the hilt, refused to consider rent reduction or abatement. Several years of potato crop failures in the late 1870s worsened the situation, as did a cholera epidemic that devastated Irish poultry flocks. As the number of evictions rose, so, too did hunger and food shortages. By 1879, whispers of famine could be heard throughout the western regions of Ireland.

But Ireland had changed since the Great Famine of the 1840s as a result of four significant developments. First, the post-Famine reduction in smallholdings meant there were far fewer households living on the edge of starvation. Second, many families could count on assistance from sons and daughters who had emigrated to the United States, Australia, and England. Third (and rather ironically), the state school system, established by the British government in 1831 to make of each student “a happy English child,” had by 1879 produced a generation of literate tenant farmers, far better equipped than their fathers and grandfathers to mobilize for relief. Finally and perhaps most importantly, the memory of the Great Famine scarred the Irish psyche and motivated Irish men and women to act.

The result was the Irish Land War of the late 1870s and 1880s. Led by the Land League, which was established in 1879 and at its height claimed 200,000 members, Irish tenants began a series of rent strikes and met evictions with violence. Angry tenants maimed cattle, destroyed property, and attacked landlords and their men. They also shunned the landlords' agents or other tenants who took over farms from evicted families—a move of devastating effectiveness in close-knit rural communities. (The application of this treatment to one estate manager, Captain Boycott, gave the term *boycott* to the English language.) The British government responded in 1881, with a Land Act. It gave Irish tenants the *Three F's*: fixity of tenure, fair rents (set by a court), and free sale by tenants of their improvements. In effect, the act made tenants co-owners of their holdings with the traditional estate owners. As we will see later in chapter 20, even such radical legislation did not transform most Irish men and women into happy British subjects, but it did constitute a significant break with the liberal ideal of the sanctity of private property.

The Irish Land War helped inspire one in the Highlands of Scotland as well. We saw in chapter 6 that Highland landlords had long preferred sheep over people on their lands. Many Scottish landlords did not want any tenants at all. They sought to turn their estates into pasturage or game preserves for deer and grouse. A series of trespass and game laws transformed much of the Highlands into vast shooting parks for the wealthy. To shoot game, even on his own land, a farmer had to possess over one hundred acres. The luckiest of the poor lived by raising sheep and eating potatoes. The unlucky, especially in the western Highlands and islands, were under constant threat of eviction. Isolated from their English-speaking landlords by their Gaelic tongue, the peasantry of the western Highlands and islands—known as *crofters* (from their tiny land holdings called crofts)—scraped out an existence next to vast sheep runs and deer preserves.

The agricultural depression thus worsened an already volatile situation, with landlords demanding higher rents from tenants whose food supplies were dwindling. Inspired by the Land War in Ireland, crofters began to refuse to pay rent or to obey eviction notices. In April 1882, three hundred men and women on the Isle of Skye battled a police force sent to arrest the leaders of a rent strike; this Battle of Braes marked the beginnings of open violence in the Crofters' War.

Over the next few years, rent strikes and violence spread across the Highlands. Proclaiming that “the People are mightier than a Lord,” the Highland Land League demanded not only lower rents, but also security

from eviction and grazing rights. The British government found itself in the position of having to send gunboats and marines to try to restore order. Then, in the general election of 1885, the Highland Land League fielded a Crofters' party that won five parliamentary seats. Faced with this political challenge, the Liberal government in 1886 passed the Crofters' Holdings Act. By granting crofters security of tenure, this legislation freed the Scottish Highlanders from the threat of eviction. It also removed rent-setting power from the landlords and gave it to a new Crofters' Commission, which tended to reduce rents. Yet the act did nothing about the crofters' central grievances: their marginalization on poor land, their lack of grazing rights, and the conflict between their interests and the game and trespass laws. Unrest in the Highlands therefore continued and poverty remained the central fact of crofters' lives.

RELATIVE INDUSTRIAL DECLINE

Although crisis characterized late-Victorian agriculture, the record of Britain's industrial sector in this era is more mixed. Many businessmen thought that the economy had taken a radical turn for the worse, and their concern inspired the government to appoint a Royal Commission on the Depression in Trade and Industry, which reported in 1886. There was, in fact, no depression of the sort that was to come in 1929: no reversal of growth, no mass unemployment, and no collapse of the industrial sector. The British economy continued to grow throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and it continued to produce significant advances in the material standard of living.

Yet there were serious economic difficulties, especially compared to the mid-Victorian years. Two simple facts are very revealing: first, overall economic growth from 1870 to 1900 averaged about 2 percent a year, as opposed to almost 3 percent a year for the first three-quarters of the century; second, in 1900, both the United States and Germany produced more iron and steel than Britain did. In general, from the 1870s on, British industrial production grew more slowly than that of two giant foreign rivals, Germany and the United States. Thus, as shown in Table 18.1, Britain's share of world manufacturing output gradually shrank.

For the first time since industrialization began, Britain had economic rivals. All around the world, British businessmen met competition in the sale of manufactured goods. They did not find it pleasant or think it fair. Both Germany and the United States protected their industries by tariffs,

Table 1S.1: Relative Shares of World Manufacturing Output

	1860	1880	1900
Britain	19.9	22.9	18.5
Germany	4.9	8.5	13.2
United States	7.2	14.7	23.6

Source: Paul Kennedy. *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987), 149.

but British industry labored under free trade. By the 1880s, some British businessmen had come to think that Britain ought to adopt protective tariffs in order to create conditions of *fair trade*, but the mystique of free trade remained influential, and most commercial men realized that Britain needed free trade in order to have the widest markets possible. In any case, resentment toward Germany grew. In 1896, for instance, E. E. Williams published a book entitled *Made in Germany* in which he claimed that competition from the Germans in Britain and abroad had become “a deliberate and deadly rivalry.”

In addition, many British manufacturers found the prices of their products falling and their profit margins squeezed. Prices for manufactured goods fell by about 25 percent in the late-Victorian years. The price decline meant that for *employed* workers, the era of the depression was actually a time of increasing living standards, but unemployment and underemployment rose sharply. At the same time, the lower level of profits denied British industry part of its traditional source of investments—plowed back from the industry itself.

Most of the problems were concentrated in heavy industry. The old staples of the Industrial Revolution—cotton textiles, iron, and, to a lesser extent, coal—now faced widespread competition from newly industrializing countries, all of which adopted the most up-to-date technologies, whereas the British lagged behind in technical innovation. Of the older industries, only in shipbuilding did the British increase their lead. The British also failed to keep pace in the very important new electrical and chemical industries. The industrial use of steam and gas was deeply entrenched in Britain; thus, the new electric power industries that grew rapidly in Germany and the United States met strong resistance in Britain. In industrial chemicals as in electricity, British scientists made many of the fundamental discoveries, but industrialists of other nations made the practical applications. German industry, for instance, made great advances in the production of aniline or synthetic dyes, which were first discovered in Britain.

Where the British excelled in the late-Victorian years was in light industries and domestic retailing. New light industries such as sewing machines, armaments, and above all, bicycles were founded on the solid base of the mechanical craft skills of the Midlands. The bicycle industry of Coventry was, moreover, the first British industry to adopt American mass production methods. In retail sales, new entrepreneurs brought about major changes by establishing retail chains that sold standardized items in the high streets of every village and town: Boots the Chemist (drug stores), Sainsbury (groceries), and Thomas Lipton (groceries). W. H. Smith established bookstalls in every railway station, selling cheap reading matter to travelers and commuters, and commercially oriented publishers established mass circulation newspapers in the cities.

How can the relatively poor performance of British industry in the late nineteenth century be explained? How did the most prosperous and industrially advanced economy begin to falter and fall behind? Part of the explanation must simply be that, as other nations began to industrialize, they would by definition break Britain's monopoly in industrial production and inevitably take some share of the world's markets. But the central fact is that British industry was handicapped by its great head start. British industry by the 1870s and 1880s produced huge income for the nation as a whole, and this could have been transformed into capital investment that would have kept British industry ahead. But as the economy matured, British society unconsciously opted for consumer pleasures over capital investment—as seems the fate of most industrial societies—and the British also habitually invested huge sums of money abroad. Because Britain, with its relatively older technology and expanding service sector, did not produce returns on investment to match those in newly industrializing areas, the British exported capital throughout the nineteenth century and at a greater rate after 1870 than before: assets abroad exceeded £1 billion in 1875 and £2 billion in 1900. And of course the British commitment to *laissez-faire* policies meant that governments would not consider policies that might have kept that capital at home.

The British head start in industrialization also created psychological and structural disadvantages. While foreign entrepreneurs aggressively pursued innovations in order to catch up, British industrialists found it hard to break with old habits in management, sales, and industrial relations. They tended to look to the past as the model for success. Similarly, British capitalists were reluctant to discard the factories and machines that they and their workers knew well; hence, they tended to squeeze profits from existing

technology by incremental changes rather than by undertaking wholesale recapitalization. British entrepreneurs were slow to adopt new forms of industrial organization such as cartels and trusts that were emerging in Germany and the United States. Although British business did gradually shift from individually owned firms and partnerships to public and private companies, the ordinary firm was much smaller than those in Germany or America. British firms *did* grow in size, and this slowly brought about a split between ownership and management, but British commerce and industry remained comparatively splintered. In the British coal industry, for instance, there were still nearly sixteen hundred coal companies in 1913.

The traditionalism of British industry and the burden of past habits affected the late-Victorian economy in another way: they retarded the deliberate application of science to industry, which was the wave of the future. Theoretical or *pure* science in Britain was second to none. But the British lagged behind Germany and the United States in both the industrial application of science and the scientific training of the work force at every level. German and American factories regularly had research laboratories by the late nineteenth century, but British industry rarely did. The British preferred the more informal methods of training and development that had served so well in the past. Victorian Britain had no state school system until 1870 and relatively few secondary schools. British higher education remained open only to the few and concentrated on the liberal arts and sciences, while despising technology and engineering. With a population roughly 70 percent that of Germany, Britain in 1913 had only 9,000 university students, whereas Germany had nearly 60,000; Britain graduated only 350 students in all fields of science and mathematics, whereas Germany graduated 3,000 in engineering alone.

The attitudes that limited the educational system in Britain arose in part from a commitment to *laissez-faire*, but also from certain cultural assumptions inherited from the past. The landed gentleman remained the ideal for most British businessmen. Many British capitalists yearned to emulate the landed orders—to make a fortune, buy an estate, and retire to a gracious life untainted by trade. British cultural elites tended to regard self-interest and profit, like industry and cities, as distinctly inferior to public service and country life. The public schools (that is, exclusive private boarding schools), in which an increasing proportion of middle-class boys were educated, inculcated the values of the leisured landowner and the amateur public servant. British literary culture from the Romantic period on

taught the superiority of the preindustrial world and the life of the mind. By the late-Victorian period, the hard edge of many industrial families had been worn down, and what the British middle class gained in culture, it lost in drive and entrepreneurship.

THE EDWARDIAN FALSE DAWN

As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, the British economy did seem to recover and prices once again began to climb. This recovery was in many ways, however, a false dawn. The main economic themes that had emerged in the late-Victorian years remained in place. The principal factor in the apparent prosperity before 1914 was a recovery of prices. Overall, the prices of food and manufactured goods increased between 20 and 25 percent from 1900 to 1914. As usual, this increase cut different ways in different social classes: manufacturers, financiers, commercial men, and their families enjoyed higher incomes again, whereas the working class, whose wages did not go up as fast, found their consuming power stagnant. This they found a bitter pill after the improvement in real wages of the 1880s and 1890s.

Meanwhile, many long-term trends remained unfavorable for the economy. Economic growth slowed between 1900 and 1914 and by some calculations stopped altogether. Productivity (production per capita) slowed, and Britain's share of the world's manufacturing output fell to slightly less than Germany's and less than half that of the United States. Capital was formed at a lower rate than at any time in the nineteenth century and at a rate much lower than in Germany or the United States. The British in the Edwardian period had a more favorable balance of payments than in the late-Victorian years, but that positive balance was much more dependent on *invisible income*—from shipping, the sale of financial services, and earnings from investment—and on the sale abroad of capital goods, such as coal, steam engines, and industrial machinery. In consequence, the British economy grew ever more vulnerable to disturbances in both the pattern and volume of world trade and to the industrialization of previously underdeveloped regions in the British spheres of influence.

It is, however, important to keep these gradual changes in perspective. Britain in 1914 was one of the three great global economic powers. It was the third largest industrial producer on earth, with South Wales alone producing one-third of the world's coal exports. The British enjoyed the second

highest (behind the United States) per capita income. Britain remained the greatest trading and financial nation in the world, as well as the leading power in shipping, international banking and finance, and overseas trading services.

SOCIAL CHANGE: THE CLASS SYSTEM

Social change in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was as profound as in any period of similar length in the British past. Britain remained a class society, but the class system itself underwent three important alterations: (1) the merger of the landed elite and the upper middle class into the *plutocracy*, (2) the expansion of the lower middle class, and (3) the solidification of working-class culture in the context of heightened class tensions.

The first of these changes—the formation of a plutocracy, or class that ruled by means of its wealth—resulted from economic troubles among the aristocracy and gentry. As men in the landed orders sought to bolster their incomes by investing in business and industry and by lending their names to commercial enterprises, they blurred the line that had long divided the landed class from the upper levels of the middle class. At the same time, the agricultural depression made landowning less viable. By 1914, the upper class was no longer *landed* but simply *propertied*. Elite status no longer depended on owning a landed estate.

The accelerated expansion of the professions also contributed to the formation of the new propertied elite. Often drawing their recruits from the middle class but functioning in close relationship to the gentry, British professionals stood almost as a separate class. To enter a profession and gain professional status, one needed not land or economic capital, but rather intellectual capital, or expertise. The professionals thus mediated between the landed and the middle classes, transmitting both values and personnel from one to the other. The professions had grown throughout the nineteenth century, but the increasing complexity of industrial society expanded their numbers rapidly. By 1914, the professional ranks included not only military officers, clergymen, doctors, and lawyers, but also university scholars, artists, architects, surveyors, engineers, and accountants.

Meanwhile, in the years between 1870 and 1914, a second change was occurring within the class society: the emergence of the lower middle class or *petty (petit) bourgeoisie* as an important and largely conservative social



81 Banbury Road, Oxford. A typical home of the substantial middle class in late-Victorian Britain. Note the Gothic influence.

force. In the first half of the nineteenth century, artisans, shopkeepers, and small business owners often marched in the front ranks of radical and democratic movements; by the late-Victorian era, however, these groups had largely embraced middle-class liberal values, particularly the liberal faith in individualism and its concurrent suspicion of activist government. The late-Victorian decades also saw this traditional petty bourgeoisie widen to include a new social grouping: *black-coated* (later called *white-collar*) *workers*. These bank tellers, sales clerks, shop assistants, travelling salesmen, and the like not only tended to earn less money and have little more education than skilled factory workers or coal miners, but they also spent their working day taking orders and doing as they were told. They did not, however, think of themselves as working class. Because they did not perform manual labor, because they went to work in a frock coat and bowler hat, they could, and most adamantly did, claim middle-class status. Struggling to abide by middle-class standards of gentility (without the support of a middle-class level of income), they sought desperately to maintain their social distance

from the proletariat—a matter of “keeping up with the Joneses and keeping away from the Smiths,” as one historian has put it.¹ As epitomized by the bank clerk, Mr. Pooter, in George Grossmith’s *Diary of a Nobody* (1892), the lower middle class rejected the collectivist ethos of the working class and instead championed individual advancement and a retreat into private family life.

The third important change in terms of the class structure was the solidification of urban working-class culture. In the years between 1870 and 1814, British working people, whose experiences were now predominately industrial and urban, settled into a distinct pattern of life—to use one historian’s phrase, “a life apart.”² The working class of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made up 75 percent of the British population (as opposed to 5 percent for the plutocracy and 20 percent for the middle class). By the early 1900s, the great majority of workers were employed in trade and industry; less than 10 percent were now working in agriculture. A majority of the employed working class were males, but nearly 10 percent of working-class women also held jobs outside their homes, most as domestic servants. Except for the domestics, few of these people had much to do with the upper classes; the face-to-face contacts of the preindustrial world were almost entirely gone, and suburbanization had completed the geographical segregation of the classes. At the same time, the divisions within the working class grew less sharp: the long-standing wage differential between skilled and less-skilled workers tended to diminish as the progress of both management techniques and technological development in mass industry worked toward de-skilling of the artisanal elite.

Work, which began at 6:00 a.m. and lasted until 5:30 p.m., dominated the lives of working-class people, even though the industrial worker rarely regarded it as fulfilling. British workers maintained a clear distinction between work and leisure time. They spent their weekday evenings after work in the pub, and they spent Saturday afternoons (which an increasing number had free) in relaxing over tea and newspapers such as *Tit-Bits*, the *Daily Mail*, and *Answers*. Sundays they rarely dedicated to church or chapel, but to sleeping in and visiting with friends. Few had paid holidays; thus, most working men and women spent their holidays at home or on day excursions to the country or the seashore.

¹Peter Bailey, “White Collars, Gray Lives: The Lower Middle Class Revisited,” *Journal of British Studies*, 38 (1999), 275.

²Meacham, *A Life Apart: The English Working Class, 1890–1914* (1977).

Besides work, three other institutions became crucial to urban working-class culture after 1870: the music hall, professional football (soccer), and fish and chips. Music halls, which were lowbrow variety theaters for the masses, offered bright lights, music, comedy, and drink. Their performers, the pop stars of the day, were themselves drawn from the working class and relied on songs and jokes drawn directly from working-class experience. Football (soccer), a medieval village sport, was revived in the 1860s by upper-class men who wished to involve working men in a vigorous and “wholesome” recreation. But in the 1880s, working men began to form their own football clubs, which quickly became professional as competition among them intensified. These clubs—Manchester United, Sheffield United, West Ham, and so on—provided focal points for local pride, rituals of communality, and diversions from dismal living conditions. As for fish and chips (a great British contribution to human civilization), British workers had consumed little seafood until the late nineteenth century, when rapid transportation and refrigeration made fresh fish available in all the big cities. By 1914, fish and chips had become a staple in the working-class diet.

In creating these institutions, the British working class was developing its own life apart from that of the plutocracy and middle class. The boundary between working-class and middle-class status, never easily penetrated, became more impermeable than ever before, especially for working-class males. Working people in growing numbers during the late-Victorian and Edwardian years rejected the moralistic preachings of their social superiors, preferring to go their own way.

Churchgoing was therefore not central to English working-class culture, although many workers—particularly those in the ranks of the higher skilled and better paid—continued to find not only solace and meaning, but also the opportunity to gain organizational and leadership experience in the chapels of Nonconformity. Most members of the working class espoused an informal form of Christian belief (what one historian has labeled “diffusive Christianity”³), which emphasized neighborliness and charity over adherence to specific doctrines, trusted that God would reward good behavior in the afterlife, and insisted that it was not necessary to go to church to be a good Christian. Most working-class parents, however, did continue to send their children to Sunday school and regarded religious lessons as an essential part of the regular school curriculum. Moreover, throughout urban

³Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1830-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 92.



Late-Victorian urban poverty: Saltney Street, Liverpool. This photo shows the common pump and open drain in a cramped street in working-class Liverpool.

Britain, both church and chapel retained their traditional role as sources of material assistance in times of trouble.

And such times could be very frequent indeed. The severe poverty suffered by many working-class people was amply demonstrated by sociological research. In the mid-1880s, Charles Booth, a wealthy manufacturer, began a massive survey published in 1889–1902 as the *Life and Labour of the People in London*. Booth intended to disprove socialist claims about the dire poverty among working people, but he found the opposite of what he expected. Defining the poverty line stringently—as the amount above which a family was barely able to maintain “decent independent life”—Booth discovered that about 30 percent of London’s population lived at or below the line. In 1901, social investigator Seebohm Rowntree and others realized what working people knew firsthand: that all of the working class, except the skilled artisans (who were about 10 percent of the total) lived on the edge of the abyss of poverty and would fall into it if they lost employment or fell ill. Both joblessness and underemployment posed serious problems for the working class—so serious that the word *unemployment* was invented in the 1880s. During the late-Victorian years, the decline of prices brought substantial improvement in real wages for *employed* working men and

women—perhaps as much as a 40-percent improvement—but price increases rolled back some of this gain after 1900. The average wage for a working man was no more than £60 or £70 a year, as opposed to £200 a year for the middle class and £1,000 a year for the upper class.

The grinding poverty of many in the working class had dire effects on their health and way of life. Most men and women worked fifty-four hours a week or more, when they could get work. For this labor, they lived on forty-five shillings a week per family, spending over half on an unvarying diet—bread (thirty-three pounds a week per family), potatoes (in the North, porridge), butter, sugar, a dozen eggs, and some meat. As the chief wage earners, men were given the choicest food; children got what was left. Boys and girls regularly went to work at eight or nine years of age even after compulsory education (legislated in 1880) brought them into school for part of the day. A large percentage of children suffered from rickets, open sores, and other diseases related to malnutrition. When the Boer War (1899–1902) brought thousands of volunteers to the army, two of every three from the working class were rejected as physically unfit. Working-class youths at age thirteen were on average two or three inches shorter and fifteen pounds lighter than upper-class children of the same age.

One important change in these years would eventually provide ambitious and talented working-class children with the means to escape the prison of poverty. In 1870, the Forster Education Act established a state elementary school system for England and Wales (similar legislation was passed for Scotland in 1872). In 1880, additional legislation made schooling compulsory for children under eleven years old, and in 1902, another major act doubled the number of secondary schools. In the long term, the effects of the new school system would be revolutionary: before 1870, the rate of illiteracy among men was 33 percent and among women 50 percent; by 1900, illiteracy had been abolished. Abolition of illiteracy radically increased the ability of working men and women to construct their own ideology and policies appropriate to a working-class point of view.

But the results of universal literacy did not come suddenly, and by 1914 they had only begun to work. Late nineteenth-century schools often were badly overcrowded and poorly taught. Their lessons were not meant to help boys and girls to improve their social status, but to prepare them for the station into which they were born. Patriotism, imperialism, and respect for their social superiors were the main themes. Moreover, many working-class families were suspicious of the new schools—as they were of most

governmental intervention in their lives—and besides, they needed their children to work. Working-class families generally took their children out of school as soon as possible. In 1906–07, for example, only 35 percent of fourteen-year-olds were still in school, and only 18 percent of sixteen-year-olds. Consequently, the level of literacy that the schools inculcated was low: before 1914, a majority of the working class still could not comprehend a text containing any but simple ideas and one-syllable words.

Few working men or women, then, held an elaborate political or economic ideology. Experience taught them that tomorrow would be much like today. As one working man wrote, “One can dream and hope, and if by chance God gives such a one imagination, it is more of a curse than a blessing.” Yet the late-Victorian and Edwardian working people did have a strong class consciousness, expressed in terms of *them* and *us*. The ups and downs of life lived on the brink of destitution typically made working people “cheeky” and wise in their own way—inclined to let things roll off their backs, not to take themselves too seriously, and above all not to accept that *them* were better than *us*.

SOCIAL CHANGE: GENDER ROLES AND RELATIONS

Gender roles and relations also altered in the late-Victorian period, although in quite different ways for working- and middle-class women. In working-class families, at least in the ranks of the respectable working class, improved living standards (relative to those earlier in the nineteenth century) meant that, increasingly, the working-class mother stayed at home with her children. In some ways, then, the middle-class ideal of *separate spheres*—the man in the public sphere of the work world and the woman in the private sphere of the home—became a possibility for many working-class families in these decades. Yet middle-class ideas of private domestic space remained inaccessible to most workers. Neighbors lived cheek-by-jowl in the densely crowded cities. Neighborhoods functioned as inner-city villages, where everyone knew each other and neighbors felt obliged to help each other out, if only because existence for everyone was precarious at best.

In these working-class neighborhood networks of support, women played a central role. A matriarchy composed of the married women of the neighborhood carefully observed social status and public behavior. No one escaped their oversight. Neighbors who violated the accepted standards of respectability would soon find their public status falling. Every urban neigh-

borhood contained its own social hierarchy: an elite of skilled workers (provided they observed the codes of respectable behavior), unskilled workers, and the down-and-out of the streets.

Women also played a vital role in holding families together. The woman's skills in household management played an important role in assuring the survival of her family. As an observer wrote, "When the mother dies the family goes to pieces." One of Charles Booth's investigators reported:

If she be a tidy woman, decently versed in the rare arts of cooking and sewing, the family life is independent, even comfortable, and the children may follow in the father's footsteps or rise to better things. If she be a gossip and a bungler—worse still, a drunkard—the family sink to the lowest level of the East London street; and the children are probably added to the number of those who gain their livelihood by irregular work and by irregular means.

The working-class wife and mother thus served as the treasurer of the family's meager resources—planning, scrimping, saving, shopping, and pawning household items at the end of the week in order to stretch the meager family income—as well as guardian of the family's respectability. A family that pawned good shoes and clothes earned high status and respectability, whereas pawning rugs, pots and pans, and bed clothes revealed low wages or imprudent living.

Ironically, the same period that saw working-class women claiming domesticity also witnessed middle-class women moving into the public spheres of education and employment. A key factor here was the spreading practice of family limitation. This major social change was tied directly to late-Victorian economic pressures on the middle class. During the mid-Victorian decades, middle-class couples had on average about six children during the span of marriage. The dynamism of the economy meant that they could keep up their high level of consumption, employ the proper number of servants, and provide for their children (including the appropriate education), even with such large families. Once the economic difficulties of the late-Victorian years began to beset middle-class families, however, couples began to recognize the expense of children, especially because the increasing complexity of society required more years of education and professional training. The average age at marriage already was high—not far below thirty years of age for men; thus, there was little opportunity to delay it further. Birth control proved to be the answer. The techniques and devices—coitus interruptus, condoms, diaphragms, and the "safe" period or rhythm method—had long been known (although most physicians believed that a woman was least fertile at the midpoint of her menstrual cycle, the time

when she is, in fact, most likely to conceive). Only in the later Victorian decades, however, did middle-class couples have the economic incentive to limit the number of children in their families. Working-class couples had no such incentive. Working-class children entered the labor force at a much earlier age than did their middle-class counterparts and so posed less of an economic drag on working-class living standards. Workers, therefore, did not begin to limit the size of their families until after 1900.

The demographic results of the adoption of birth control are clear. The average number of children in each family in Britain (discounting Ireland) fell from about six in 1870 to a little over three in the early twentieth century. By the 1920s, it had fallen to just over two per marriage. The population growth that had exploded upward in the eighteenth century began to slow down, *even though the mortality rate was falling*. The growth of the population, which had reached 17 percent per decade in the 1810s and held at 11 percent per decade in the 1850s and 1860s, declined to about 10 percent per decade in the early 1900s. By the 1920s, the British population was barely growing at all.

This demographic shift began with the late-Victorian middle class and had important consequences for late-Victorian middle-class women. The reduction of the number of children served as a liberation from some of the burdens of childbearing and child care and therefore as a release for activities outside the home. One result was an increase in the number of middle-class women involved in philanthropy and other good causes such as temperance reform and social work in the slums. Well-to-do married women still found paid employment socially unacceptable, but voluntary social work gave them an alternative outlet for their energy and talent; it was an extension outside the home of the traditional female role of moral care. By such philanthropic activity, thousands of middle-class women gained valuable experience and expertise in public life.

At the same time, as middle-class males put off marriage or emigrated, the number of unmarried women grew. The goal for respectable women was still marriage, but the number of unmarried women had risen markedly between 1851 and 1871: in the 1870s, almost one of every three British women between twenty-four and thirty-five was unmarried. As a result, the number of middle-class women who went to work outside the home increased sharply. Not only were more middle-class women (almost all of them single) seeking work, but also the economy was producing more jobs suitable for respectable women. No longer was the middle-class girl in need

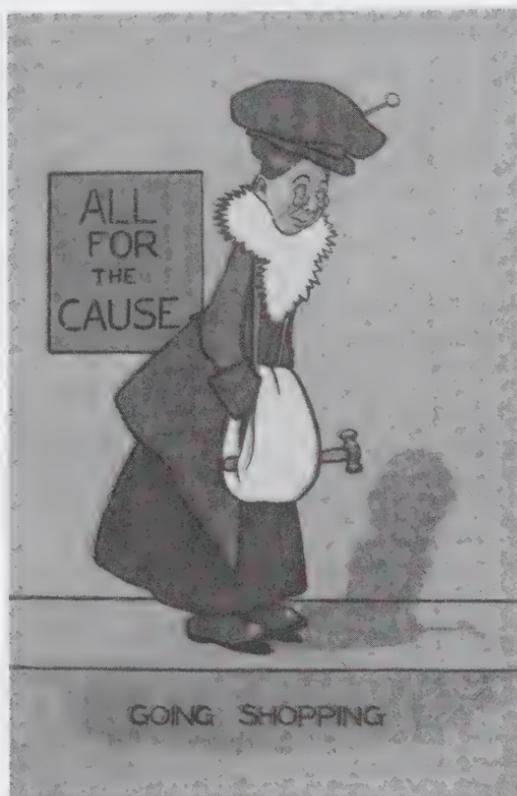
of income restricted to becoming a governess; the more service-oriented economy opened positions for nurses, teachers, clerks, shop assistants, and secretaries.

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

All of these changes made powerful contributions to the emergence of the women's movement. This first wave of feminism was not by any means a single, organized campaign. Some feminists, such as Sophia Jex-Blake (1840–1912) and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (1836–1917), worked to break the male monopoly over the medical profession. They succeeded: Jex-Blake opened even the medical schools to women in the 1880s, despite Queen Victoria's vehement disapproval. Others, such as Emily Davies (1830–1921), sought to establish women's colleges even within the staunch male preserves, Oxford and Cambridge. They founded colleges for women in both of the ancient universities, despite fears on the part of some males that academic standards would be lowered and male undergraduates would be distracted from their work. (Women were not allowed to take degrees from Oxford until 1921 and from Cambridge until 1948.) Josephine Butler (1828–1906) and others attacked the notorious Victorian double standard in sexual morality by campaigning to have the Contagious Diseases Act abolished. This act, passed in the 1860s, enabled police in army and navy towns to force prostitutes to submit to medical inspection for venereal disease. After a long campaign, in which Butler called on men to practice the same chastity they preached to women, Parliament repealed the act in 1886.

Another element in the women's movement worked to reform the legal position of women in marriage. Irish writer Frances Power Cobbe (1822–1904) agitated successfully in the 1860s and 1870s for magistrates to impose more severe sentences on wife beaters. Women gradually won some custody rights over their children in divorce cases. By a series of laws culminating in 1882, married women were allowed to retain their property. Divorce, however, was not granted to women on the same grounds as men until 1923; until then, they still had to prove something in addition to adultery to win a divorce.

Finally, there was a campaign to win the national suffrage. Given the importance of Parliament in British life, the women's movement inevitably focused much of its energy on gaining the right to vote. Beginning with J. S. Mill's famous essay *The Subjection of Women* (1869), a slowly growing



Going Shopping. This Edwardian era postcard shows a genteel suffragette setting off to shatter shop windows with a hammer hidden in her handwarmer. Both the pro- and anti-women's suffrage campaigns used postcards and posters to communicate their messages.

number of men and women argued that women were as capable as men of that reasoned behavior required by the suffrage. Led by Lydia Becker (1827–90) and Millicent Fawcett (1847–1929), *suffragists* campaigned for women's votes (“on the same terms as men”) by means of persuasion: reasoned appeals, lobbying, petitions, and political pressure. This essentially middle-class movement met staunch resistance from people—female as well as male—who believed that the vote would spoil the innocent purity of women, that it would ruin marital harmony, or that the justifiable claims of women were being met without it. Most women, like most men, continued to think that the proper sphere for women was the home and that the proper woman's role should be, as one wife wrote, that of “a quite unillustrious, more or less hampered, dependent wife and mother.”

In the early twentieth century, the militant *suffragettes*, a highly visible minority in the feminist movement, cast off the relatively sedate tactics of the suffragists. The central figures in this new phase of the feminist movement were Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928) and her two daughters,

Christabel and Sylvia. Mrs. Pankhurst, wife of a radical Manchester lawyer, founded the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903. Within two years of its founding, the WSPU turned toward militant action: disruption of political meetings; demonstrations; political marches; and, from 1912, window smashing, arson, and even physical assault. In 1913, a suffragette threw herself under the hooves of the king's horse on Derby Day and was killed. The suffragette movement directly challenged the political and cultural status quo. By taking to the streets, these women attacked the assumption that a woman's proper place was in the home and that the proper place for politics was in Parliament. Even more fundamentally, by opting for violence rather than reasoned debate, they rejected the liberal faith in the rational individual. The sight of respectable middle-class wives and mothers smashing windows and assaulting politicians accelerated the erosion of Victorian certainties.

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Chapter 19

Crisis of Confidence, 1870–1914

The economic and social changes of the late-Victorian and Edwardian years contributed to a crisis of confidence as the difficulties of the economy, the “discovery” of chronic poverty, and the alteration of the social structure threw many Victorian ideas into doubt. To many men and women in the educated classes, especially younger people, Victorian ideas and values no longer seemed satisfying. Consequently, in cultural life, the years between 1870 and 1914 in Britain were filled with exploration and speculation as people searched for new ordering principles. An explosion of *isms*—not only feminism but also scientific naturalism, New Liberalism, socialism, and aestheticism—bore witness to the cultural ferment of this troubled and exciting period.

SCIENTIFIC NATURALISM

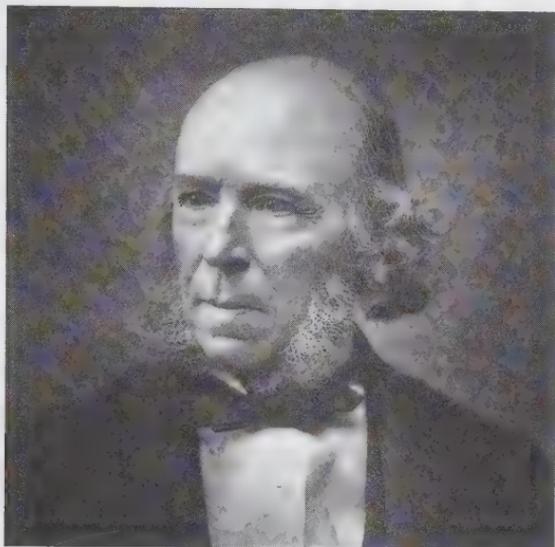
One of the most influential intellectual efforts to find a new ordering principle for both an understanding of the natural world and a guide for behavior was *scientific naturalism*, the British variety of a cult of science that emerged in most of the Western world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As the influence of Christianity diminished, science, which was as yet seen as incapable of doing any harm, seemed to many thinkers to be the best alternative. One English writer said in 1878, “In the struggle of life with the facts of existence, Science is the bringer of aid; in the struggle of the soul with the mystery of existence, Science is the bringer of light.” Many scientists in the late-Victorian period, including Herbert Spencer, T. H. Huxley, and Francis Galton, aggressively asserted the claims of science as a new religion and of scientists as a new priesthood.

British scientific naturalists intended to create nothing less than a science-based culture. Their doctrine comprised four basic points. First, they held that the universe, or nature, is a mechanism, and therefore all events have material causes, in the sense of being mechanically determined

like the movement of cogs in a machine. Thought and ideas cannot cause the natural world to move and interact; all causes are material. Second, they believed that evolution describes the working of this machine. Third, as Huxley said, there is “but one kind of knowledge and but one method of acquiring it”: empirical science, which should be extended to all realms of thought, including ethics and social behavior. Finally, they contended that, because it is not possible to have any knowledge of the supernatural, the correct outlook is agnosticism: not the claim that God and the supernatural do not exist, but simply that one cannot have any valid knowledge about them at all. Ethics and morals must be derived from the facts of the natural world, not from the unknowable.

Perhaps the greatest—certainly the most prolific and famous—scientific naturalist was Herbert Spencer (1820–1902). It is hard to overestimate the influence of Spencer in late-Victorian Britain (and America, where he was even more influential). In the 1890s, a letter was delivered to him addressed: “Herbt. Spencer, England, and if the postman doesn’t know where he lives, why, he ought to.” Widely regarded as a prodigious genius, Spencer tried to create a comprehensive philosophy by universalizing science. He was trained as a civil engineer, and his philosophy always reflected that no-nonsense background. Impenetrably self-confident, Spencer acquired his fundamental ideas early and never swerved from them: (1) that evolution, operating through the “survival of the fittest” (a phrase he invented), explains change in nature, human life, and society; (2) that evolution moves from “simple homogeneity” to “complex heterogeneity”—that is, there is in society as in nature a continuous specialization of function; and (3) that every event is caused, but “every cause produces more than one effect.”

Spencer drew from these evolutionary views a strong defense of *laissez-faire* economics and an anti-interventionist attitude toward government policy. He believed that because it is impossible to predict the effects of economic or social legislation, governments should try to do as little as possible. Furthermore, Spencer believed that social welfare policies only prevent people from adapting to their environment, which they must do to survive. Spencer saw society in biological terms: “I have contended that policies, legislative and other, while hindering the survival of the fittest, further the propagation of the unfit [and] work grave mischiefs.” He thought that social progress was inevitable if people were left alone because the natural evolution of society is toward more complex specialization and interdependence.



Herbert Spencer. The most famous evolutionary philosopher in late-Victorian Britain and one of the most influential thinkers in the Western world at the time.

Such views became the stock-in-trade of defenders of capitalism and opponents of governmental social reform after 1870.

Spencer's application of evolutionary theory to social policy places him among the most prominent scientific naturalists of the late-Victorian and Edwardian years, the *Social Darwinists*. In fact, Spencer's view of evolution was not exactly that of Darwin, for Spencer believed in the inheritance of acquired characteristics, and Darwin did not. Social Darwinists applied Darwinian theory to society as a whole. Some Social Darwinists advocated domestic social reform to make society stronger and more "efficient." But many Social Darwinists opposed measures of social reform on the same grounds as did Spencer. They thought it wrong to interfere with what Spencer called the "progressive" forces of nature: "There is no greater curse to posterity than that of bequeathing to them an increasing population of imbeciles and idlers and criminals." These Social Darwinists believed that private charity was adequate for all reasonable relief of poverty and that state intervention would block the natural struggle of life and prevent the beneficial weeding out of the weak. To interfere with this process would be harmful to the "British race" and to the world. Alfred Marshall (1842–1924), the leading economist of the late 1800s, wrote:

... if the lower classes of Englishmen multiply more rapidly than those which are morally and physically superior, not only will the population of England deteriorate, but also that part of the population of America and Australia which descends from Englishmen will be less intelligent than it otherwise would be.

Such views obviously were racist—a common failing of Social Darwinism—and also led logically to *eugenics*, the idea of deliberately improving the genetic pool of the population. The leading British eugenicist was Francis Galton (1822–1911), a Social Darwinist, social scientist, and statistician. Galton argued that accepting evolution as the key to progress meant that natural selection should be assisted in doing its work. “Eugenics,” he said, “cooperates with the workings of Nature by securing that humanity shall be represented by the fittest races. What Nature does blindly, slowly, and ruthlessly, man may do so providently, quickly, and kindly.” Society should not attempt to cut the high mortality rate of the poor by social legislation, but it should promote the marriage and fertility of “the fit” by measures such as creating a register, for interbreeding purposes, of the best families. Other eugenicists later advocated policies to discourage marriage and reproduction among the criminal, disabled, or chronically ill segments of the population.

Social Darwinism enjoyed its heyday in the 1880s and 1890s in Britain, and it retained a wide popularity in more or less diluted form among the middle class through the first half of the twentieth century. The well-to-do found Social Darwinism a satisfying explanation of why they were at the top of the heap and the poor were at the bottom. But in the years between 1900 and 1914, British academic philosophers abruptly took the whole theory of scientific naturalism in a new direction. The rejection of Social Darwinism as a basis for ethics was first articulated by two young philosophers at Cambridge University, G. E. Moore (1873–1958) and Bertrand Russell (1872–1970). By means of highly technical logical analysis, Moore and Russell showed that the logical base of Social Darwinism—indeed, of utilitarianism and all other previous ethical systems—was vague and indefensible.

Yet Moore and Russell clearly stood in the broad tradition of British empiricism and the scientific approach to knowledge. Moore, an analytical philosopher of ethics, set as his goal the foundation of “any ethics that can claim to be scientific.” Russell, a mathematical logician of scintillating genius and acerbic wit, wanted to make philosophy consistent with modern science and indeed to reshape philosophy according to the latest scientific and mathematical discoveries. In a large number of popular lectures and books, most notably *Why I Am Not a Christian*, Russell carried on in the tradition of T. H. Huxley in attacking what he regarded as the hypocrisy, cruelty, and irrationalism of Christianity. Throughout the twentieth century in Britain, this has been the position of a broad stream of progressive (often

left-wing), scientifically oriented intellectuals, the heirs of David Hume and the Enlightenment.

NEW LIBERALISM

The search for a new ordering principle for society also produced a new direction for liberalism—the *New Liberal* movement. Between 1870 and 1914, the New Liberals, a group of intellectuals, most of whom were professional writers and journalists rather than businessmen, modified Victorian liberalism by calling for greater concern with society as a whole and for a more positive role for the state. Often referred to as *collectivists* in their own day, the New Liberals never captured the rank and file of the Liberal party; nevertheless, they were extremely influential in creating both the philosophy and the reality of the British welfare state.

Like their Victorian Liberal predecessors, the New Liberals were individualists, but they had very different ideas concerning how the good of the individual was to be promoted. Earlier British Liberals, as we saw in chapter 13, believed in the rationality and perfectibility of individuals, in constitutional liberty and representative government, and in the self-regulation of the free-market economy. They thought that the natural action of economic and social forces, if unimpeded by either privilege or the state, would maximize freedom and prosperity. But the “discovery” of chronic poverty by social investigators such as Booth and Rowntree and by social activists such as the Reverend Andrew Mearns (author of a best-selling pamphlet in 1883, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*) proved that the economic and social systems had not, in fact, worked for all. Confronted with these social realities, New Liberals insisted that the state would have to intervene in society to correct the shortcomings of capitalism.

The contrast between liberalism and New Liberalism can be seen clearly in the works of J. A. Hobson (1858–1940), a prolific writer on social subjects and a heretical economist. Hobson dared to take on Adam Smith by arguing that the economic system did not regulate itself automatically. In fact, the unequal distribution of incomes allowed the rich to save too much and therefore to depress consumption, and under-consumption caused periodic depression and chronic unemployment. In *Imperialism: A Study* (1902), Hobson applied his theory of malfunctioning capitalism to imperialism to show that the motives for empire were not as noble as they professed to be. While impoverishing the masses, Hobson contended, unregulated capitalism

generates huge capital surpluses for an elite, who must then find somewhere to invest these surpluses. Imperialism, then, is the inevitable result of capitalism.

From 1880 to 1914, the New Liberals generated a substantial body of reform proposals, including old age pensions, unemployment insurance, health insurance, and a minimum wage, based on the philosophy of *positive freedom*. This philosophy held that the historic role of liberalism—the abolition of obstacles to individual liberty of action—was over, and that the time had come for constructive action by the state to create an environment in which all individuals had *freedom to act*, not just *freedom from arbitrary authority*. Thus, the New Liberals shifted the focus of liberalism from the autonomous individual to the person as part of a whole society, and they conceived of the state as society's agency for producing democracy and equality. As one New Liberal wrote: "‘New Liberalism’ differed from the old in that it envisaged more clearly the need for important economic reform, aiming to give a positive significance to the ‘equality’ which figured in the democratic triad of liberty, equality, and fraternity."

New Liberal philosophy stemmed from three intellectual sources. One was the thought of John Stuart Mill, the great mid-Victorian liberal. During his lifetime Mill had shifted the emphasis of liberalism from material to moral self-development of the individual. From the 1860s on, British liberal thinkers concerned themselves with establishing the conditions in which individuals had maximum opportunity for moral improvement. It was a short step for his successors to conclude that the state should actively create conditions in which people, even the working class, could exercise genuine freedom of moral choice: conditions that would be free of poverty, misery, disease, ignorance, and economic servitude.

The second intellectual source of New Liberalism was evolutionary thought. Whereas evolution taught some thinkers such as Spencer that survival of the fittest required laissez-faire policies, it taught others that society is an organism, with the well-being of any individual depending on the well-being of the others. By this view, the direction of social evolution is toward cooperation, not competition, and cooperation can be assisted by the rational use of state power. According to the leading New Liberal intellectual, J. T. Hobhouse (1864–1929), human evolution involved progress toward intellectual and moral improvement; therefore, the state could (and should) intervene rationally in society to create the environment that in turn shapes the development of individuals.

The third source of New Liberal thought was *philosophical idealism*, particularly the ideas of T. H. Green (1836–82). Green was an Oxford philosopher and a teacher who possessed great personal magnetism. Like many of the other idealist philosophers of his generation, Green was the son of an Evangelical clergyman; he found, however, that modern science and scholarship made adherence to orthodox Christianity impossible. For Green, an idealist philosophy drawing on the German thinkers Kant and Hegel provided a rational substitute for religion. As he put it, his interest in philosophy was wholly religious, in the sense that it is “the reasoned intellectual expression of the effort to get to God.” Green’s philosophy, like that of all the British idealists, was highly technical and ridden with Germanic jargon, yet it became the dominant style of philosophy in the British universities in the late-Victorian years.

The idealists sought to see all things—nature, the universe, experience—as a whole and to show how the mind itself plays a role in constituting what we perceive as reality. In this regard, it was antiscientific, for scientists liked to investigate nature one piece at a time and to regard each bit as existing independently of the human mind. Moore and Russell after 1900 led a ferocious attack on idealism on behalf of scientific naturalism, but in the meantime, idealism had become the most influential mode of philosophy in late-Victorian Britain. To Green, God was the infinite and eternal unifying feature of the world, expressed in people as generous and altruistic morality. People express their “best selves” and find unity with God by high-minded, socially oriented behavior. In other words, people reach their highest ethical potential only in society and only in sacrifice of their own interests for others. Thus, for Green, and for his many disciples among the New Liberals, individualism was related not to the pursuit of self-interest but to self-sacrifice.

Green inspired a generation of Oxford students and gave them a motive for social action. Many of the New Liberals had lost their religion and were seeking a substitute. As members of the elite, many of them felt a sense of guilt in the wake of revelations of poverty and class divisions. This combination of class-inspired guilt and New Liberal idealism helped shape the university settlement movement. Middle- and upper-class university students and graduates lived in settlement houses in urban slums. Living and working among the poor, they sought to close the gap between working and upper classes through both personal connections and educational programs.

SOCIALISM

Among the various efforts to find a new ordering principle, the one that most upset conventional middle-class businessmen was socialism. Socialism may be generally defined as any ideology that holds cooperation rather than competition as the organizing principle of society; hence, socialism focuses on the social as opposed to the individual aspect of human nature. In the late-Victorian and Edwardian years, many people, most of them from the middle class, began to think that socialism offered a better analysis of poverty as well as more idealistic values than capitalism.

In the mid-Victorian era, socialism took shape as a romantic protest against the atomizing impact of industrialization. Romantic socialism had both Christian and aesthetic impulses. Christian Socialists such as F. D. Maurice (1805–72) urged individual and social reforms aimed at reconciling class interests and building up a Christian commonwealth in which God's love, incarnate in Christ, served as the model for social relations. At the same time, cultural critic John Ruskin reworked Thomas Carlyle's vehement critique of industrial capitalism into a call for a new kind of social order based on an idealized vision of medieval society and the desire to restore the respect for craftsmanship and for the craftsman that he thought had been lost in the modern world.

Karl Marx (1818–83) offered a brand of socialism that was very different from Ruskin's romantic medievalism. Marx set out a "scientific" analysis of classical political economy and of British society under capitalism. Marx, of course, was German, but he worked as an exile in London from 1849 until his death. In his mature work, *Das Kapital* (*Capital*), first published in German in 1867, Marx combined German philosophy, French socialist theory, and British political economy. He regarded capitalism, of which Britain was the most advanced example, as a system that necessarily exploited its workers. The key, he thought, is that the value of any object is equal to the labor that went into its production, yet a worker in capitalist industry produces objects worth much more than is needed to give him or her subsistence. An oversupply of laborers ("the reserve army of labor") keeps wages at a subsistence level. The difference between the value of what the worker produces and what he or she is paid is profit, and the capitalist takes all of it for his own purposes. Marx believed that, when capitalism reached maturity, it would cause its own collapse. As capitalists exploited their workers more and more ruthlessly, the workers would spontaneously rebel and establish a socialist state.



Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park, 1892. The artist's animal-like depiction of the socialist speaker conveys the political message of this sketch.

The failure of British workers to revolt in the 1850s and 1860s frustrated Marx. He regarded the union movement as the product of *false consciousness*—that is, workers misunderstood the real structure of capitalism and their own real interests and thus tried by unionizing to secure a place within the system, rather than seeking to overthrow that system. British working men and women, however, remained largely unpersuaded by Marx's arguments, although by the 1880s, the troubles in the British economy gave Marxism some credibility. *Capital* was not published in English until 1887; thus, British radicals knew of Marx's ideas only through pamphlets or summaries published by people other than Marx himself. Nevertheless, as collectivists of all sorts, including socialists, began to multiply and organize clubs and societies in the 1880s, Marxist ideas formed one of the traditions upon which they drew.

H. M. Hyndman (1842–1921) was one of the British socialists most heavily influenced by Marx. A businessman and utilitarian, Hyndman read a French translation of *Capital* in 1880. At about the same time, he began organizing the Social Democratic Federation, a club that included both

middle-class and working-class radicals. In his book, *England for All*, Hyndman borrowed extensively from Marx (and, much to Marx's annoyance, without acknowledgment). But in certain ways Hyndman's views differed from those of Marx. In particular, Hyndman tended to think that significant change could occur through gradual state and local social reforms, whereas Marx preferred not to cooperate with existing institutions.

In any case, Hyndman had a domineering personality, and this caused a break with one of the most influential British socialists, William Morris (1834–96). Morris founded a rival organization, the Socialist League—but he was far from just a political organizer. He was, in fact, a multitasking genius—poet, painter, designer, architect, social critic, and founder of the British arts and crafts movement. Guided by Ruskin's aesthetic critique of industrial capitalism, Morris followed a path from High Church Anglicanism to socialism. Like Ruskin, Morris was a romantic medievalist, an admirer of the Gothic style, the coherent medieval culture, and the craftsmanship of the medieval guilds. He wanted above all to create a society in which the ordinary worker took joy in producing genuinely useful and beautiful objects. He wrote:

Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization. . . . The struggle of mankind for many ages had produced nothing but this sordid, aimless, ugly, confusion.



William Morris's bed in his home at Kelmscott Manor. This splendidly crafted piece of furniture shows how medievalism, socialism, and aestheticism came together in the arts-and-crafts movement inspired by Morris.

Morris grafted Marxism onto this aesthetic vision. He believed that Marx explained what Ruskin had observed: that modern industry turned the craftsman into a cog in the industrial machine. He thought a profound revolution in both social relations and individual values was needed, and to this end he devoted himself, not to politics or trade union organization, but to raising the consciousness of both the middle class and the working class by writing and speaking. In *News from Nowhere* (1891) Morris presented an anarchistic utopia: a society in which all political, economic, and social regulations had disappeared and the individual was free to create spontaneously. Such aesthetic views were too impractical to attract more than a small following, but in a more general way they became very influential in a romantic and idealistic stream of British socialism. Morris's ideas have repeatedly emerged in Christian, guild, and anarchist types of socialism in Britain.

Fabianism, the dominant form of British socialism in the years between 1880 and 1914, could not have been more different from Morris's vision. Fabian socialism was utilitarian, practical, and gradualist, and it was committed to social efficiency and rule by experts in social science. The essence of Fabian doctrine was that social institutions, not the whole culture or human nature itself, needed reform. Parliament and local government provided the means to reform; thus, revolution was neither necessary nor desirable. Most Fabians were middle-class intellectuals, most of whom had close friends and associates among the New Liberals. Fabianism grew out of an organization characteristic of late-Victorian Britain—the Fellowship of the New Life, a society of young men and women of deep ethical concerns, looking for a new principle to live by. The founders of the Fabian Society in 1884 were the more practical members of this group. Over time, they developed from their ethical interests a distinctive socialist outlook and program.

Sidney Webb (1859–1947) and Beatrice Webb (1858–1943) became the most influential of all the Fabians. Husband and wife, as well as partners in economic and social research, the Webbs had a high regard for bureaucrats and expertise (Sidney was a civil servant and Beatrice a professional social scientist). As Beatrice was later to say, she and Sidney were “benevolent, bourgeois, and bureaucratic.” They were also people of unflagging industry, a formidable if rather strange pair.

Sidney Webb rooted Fabian economics in the British tradition of political economy. He accepted the economic value of individual self-interest: “It is the business of the community not to lead into temptation this

healthy natural feeling but so to develop social institutions that individual egoism is necessarily directed to promote the well-being of all." The key to implementing this idea, Webb insisted, was to extend the idea of *rent*, as it had been set out in classical political economy, to other forms of property. Ever since the early 1800s, British political economists such as David Ricardo and J. S. Mill had argued that rent in modern society goes up because of the growth of the population and the economic development of the community, not because of the landowner's efforts. The community is justified, therefore, in taxing this "unearned increment" of rent to its full value, and in turning it to the use of the community. Webb extended this theory to capital and "special skills," for he believed that these forms of property were also socially created wealth and eligible for state expropriation for the good of all.

The Fabians' admiration of the expert and the state, their practicality, and their interest in social efficiency gave them an influence across the political spectrum. In the 1880s and 1890s, the Fabians sought to accomplish their goals through the Liberal party. But the Webbs' concern for national efficiency and their belief in the superiority of progressive nations such as Britain made them enthusiasts of empire. Such views linked them to imperialists among the Conservative party as well as some Liberals. It was, however, the new Labour party, formed in 1906, that most clearly embraced the gradualist, administrative, democratic, and reformist tendencies of Fabianism.

Throughout the late-Victorian and Edwardian years, socialism in all its permutations remained largely a movement of middle-class intellectuals. As Robert Roberts recalled from his boyhood in the slum of Salford, near Manchester: "Before 1914 the great majority of the working class were ignorant of Socialist doctrine in any form." Nevertheless, socialism did begin to penetrate small circles in the working class in the 1880s. By 1900, there were perhaps thirty thousand socialists in Britain. After 1900, *syndicalism* (a revolutionary ideology that sought to use militant industrial action to bring about a more egalitarian society) won a foothold in some of the biggest unions, most notably the coal miners. Most working-class socialists, however, were not doctrinaire but idealistic, deriving their ideals of equality and community from the works of cultural critics such as Carlyle and Ruskin. They wanted greater control over and participation in industrial decisions, a reinvigoration of craftsmanship and community life, and the restoration of independence and dignity to workers. Such views were expressed by the

socialist most widely read by British working people, Robert Blatchford, whose paper, the *Clarion*, sold forty thousand copies a week in 1894.

AESTHETICISM

New Liberalism and socialism were obviously directed toward political and social action, and as we have seen, scientific naturalism had political implications. But the other main *ism* of the years between 1870 and 1914 was a very different kind of movement: aestheticism. There were many varieties of aesthetes in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain—cultural critics, bohemian poets, urbane dandies, and ardent modernists—but all of them rejected conventional Victorian attitudes in favor of art, beauty, and intellect, each to be exercised for its own sake. Out of this anti-utilitarian and anti-moralistic revolt was born *modernism*, the dominant theme in twentieth-century British (and European) high culture. An umbrella term, modernism embraces a huge variety of artistic and literary movements, but at its core is a rebellion against Victorian standards and values.

Before modernism, however, came aestheticism. British aesthetes were part of a long native tradition of opposition to industrial society and its dominant middle class. From the time of the Romantic poets through Carlyle and Dickens, many British writers had tried to speak as prophets to the general reading public, warning of the disastrous cultural consequences of industrialization, self-interest, and greed. In the 1860s and 1870s, however, writers began to turn away from the public, to write for each other, and to preserve a refuge for art. They consequently adopted the doctrine of “art for art’s sake.”

How can this turn in the romantic tradition be explained? Part of the answer can be found in the receding tide of religion, which left many British intellectuals stranded on the shoals of doubt and disbelief; for them, art became yet another substitute for religion. Additionally, the characteristic late-Victorian loss of confidence created an unease that the aesthetes shared, as well as a disillusionment that they felt on realizing the failure of earlier writers such as Carlyle and Dickens to effect a social transformation. Finally, there was a sense among serious writers that they were losing control over their audience. In the earlier Victorian period, writers knew that their readership was relatively compact, middle-class, and influential, and they instinctively understood this audience. But with the spread of state schools, a new, massive, semiliterate, working-class audience came into existence.

Journalists and hack writers given to sensationalism could reach this audience, but serious writers felt bewildered and threatened by it. They lost confidence in themselves as prophets and increasingly sought to write only for each other.

The seeds of this aesthetic tendency began to germinate in the ideas of Matthew Arnold (1822–88) in the 1860s. An influential literary critic, Arnold was also a profound social observer. He believed that the Victorian age, with its materialism, its devotion to self-interest, its class conflict, and its political battles, was a supremely unpoetic age. Modern life seemed to him diseased, “with its sick hurry, its divided aims/Its heads o’ertaxed, its palsied hearts.” By the latter 1860s, Arnold believed that class conflict, in which the middle class (or Philistines, as he labeled them) was dominant, was creating a kind of spiritual anarchy. He argued that, because Christianity no longer could supply the necessary coherence, culture must be the antidote to anarchy. He defined *culture* in a highly intellectualized way: the pursuit of perfection by the study of the best that has been thought and said in the world.

Arnold still held on to the hope for social revitalization, but many of his disciples in the late-Victorian years found it impossible to sustain that hope. Many felt so alienated from the values of bourgeois society that they could not engage in socially constructive writing. In reaction, they idealized a life spent in the rarified atmosphere of art, spirit, and intellect. They aggressively rejected the notion that society had any claims on their art. They insisted that all art—painting, writing, and music—ought to be judged by standards peculiar to itself. Art was for art’s sake only.

The twin themes of aestheticism—that one’s life itself should be a work of art and that art is independent of social usefulness—appeared in much late-Victorian literature, but were expressed most clearly in the life and work of Walter Pater (1839–94), an Oxford tutor, literary critic, and novelist. Pater insisted that art is to be judged by its own standards of perfection and that the goal of life “is not action, but contemplation—being as distinct from doing—a certain disposition of mind.” One should seek always to burn with a “hard, gem-like flame” of aesthetic ecstasy. For such aesthetes, art had become the new religion.

In the 1890s, this doctrine spawned a small circle of artists who took it to the extreme—the *decadents*, as they came to be called. One of the most famous of these glitterati was the Irish novelist and playwright Oscar Wilde (1854–1900). Wilde and his fellow decadents loved to shock the bourgeoisie of London with their clever and ironic turn of phrase, their praise of exotic (and erotic) beauty, their exploration of the pleasures of evil, and their dan-

dified dress and manners. Wilde confronted Victorian values with decadent epigrams in the preface to his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

The artist is the creator of beautiful things . . .
 They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean
 only Beauty.
 There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book.
 Books are well written, or badly written. That
 is all . . .
 All art is quite useless.

Decadence was a dead end, but aesthetic ideas about life and art helped shape the outlook of the most famous literary and intellectual circle of Edwardian Britain, the Bloomsbury Group (named after the area in London in which many of them lived between 1905 and 1925). Most of the male members of the Bloomsbury Group (Leonard Woolf, Lytton Strachey, E. M. Forster, and J. M. Keynes) were students at Cambridge around the turn of the century, and most had been members of a secret undergraduate society called the Apostles. The dominant figure of the Apostles was the unworldly but personally charismatic young philosopher G. E. Moore (1873–1958). He taught his students and friends to adopt a refreshingly rigorous analytical style of thought and to accept the elitist view that the two highest values were states of mind: the contemplation of beautiful objects and the enjoyment of personal friendships. The Apostles believed that these doctrines liberated them from the restrictions and oppressions of Victorian convention. As they moved to Bloomsbury from Cambridge and rounded out the group with two sisters, Virginia and Vanessa Stephen (who married Leonard Woolf and Clive Bell, respectively), they made Moore's philosophy into a creed: "We repudiated entirely," Keynes wrote, "customary morals, conventions, and traditional wisdom."

The aesthetic theory of the Bloomsbury Group was a foundation stone of modernism in Britain. Because, in their view, contemplation of beautiful objects was a complex and learned activity, in practice it was suitable only for an artistic elite. The "Bloomsberries" were snobs, and by the same token, they thought that art was the only refining activity in life, apart from cultivation of the most exquisite personal relationships. They tended to think that all political and social policy should be directed to the creation and support of art. They thought that ultimately art would recivilize society, but not by direct social action. Works of art, they believed, are not the servants or the mirrors of society; their role is not social instruction or propaganda. A true work of art is autonomous: a painting is not a photograph, a biography is not a slavish chronology, nor is a novel a realistic description or a moral



Bloomsbury: Bertrand Russell, John Maynard Keynes, and Lytton Strachey in 1915. These three intellectuals were among the members of the Bloomsbury Group, which dominated British high culture in the early years of the twentieth century.

lesson. Art calls for an emotion of its own (“the aesthetic emotion”), which arises from the relations among the formal elements of the work—the lines, volumes, colors, images, and symbols. Bloomsbury theory thus added *formalism*, an important ingredient of modernism, to aesthetic values.

The aesthetic belief in the special role of the artist or intellectual revived the romantic belief in symbolism. *Symbolists* believed that by symbols alone can truths about the unseen or supernatural world be communicated. Symbolism connects the works of two of the most important English Edwardian novelists, who were in other ways about as different as two writers can be: E. M. Forster and D. H. Lawrence. The upper-middle-class Forster (1879–1970) was a Cambridge graduate, a writer of mild temperament, and an unforceful Liberal with a refined sensibility. In *Howards End* (1910), Forster used a country house to symbolize England itself; the inheritance of the house, like that of the country itself, is contested by the pushy business class and the sensitive intellectuals.

D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930) was one of the first English working-class novelists. The son of a coal miner, he had to break through the constrictions imposed by the industrial and class systems, as well as the oppressive affection of his mother. His social and psychological vision gave Lawrence a

unique perspective on society, personality, and sexuality that informed a series of novels of astonishing energy and originality, including *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *Women in Love* (1920), and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). Lawrence's hostility to Victorian moral, social, and literary convention revealed modernism in full force.

Suggested Reading

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Chapter 20

Revival on the Celtic Fringe

The English were quick to assume that what was good for England was good for the rest of Britain. England was by far the biggest and strongest segment of Great Britain, having in 1911 approximately 75 percent of all the people of the British Isles. The English habitually said “England” when they meant “Britain,” and on the basis of prejudice rather than science, they asserted that the “Anglo-Saxon race,” from which English men and women allegedly descended, was far superior to the “Celtic race” of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. In the late-Victorian years, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland came to be known in England as “the Celtic fringe”—a perfect verbal symbol of their marginal status in the minds of the English. In reaction, political and cultural leaders in each of the three Celtic countries asserted their own national identities and sponsored national cultural revivals. These revivals were largely independent of each other; each national revival took a different form and achieved a different expression of national identity. There was revival *on* the Celtic fringe, not revival *of* the Celtic fringe. Viewed together, however, these revivals composed an important force in British political and cultural history; they helped create the political and cultural contexts in which millions of inhabitants of the British Isles have identified themselves.

WALES: COAL, NONCONFORMITY, AND LINGUISTIC NATIONALISM

In Wales, cultural revival was inseparably tied with two important themes: the rapid growth of the coal industry and the dominance of Nonconformist Christianity. In the second half of the nineteenth century, coal became the great Welsh industry, with the famous coal mines of the Rhondda valleys opening in 1851. By 1913, more than 250,000 men worked in the Welsh coalfields.

The middle-class entrepreneurs of the Welsh coal industry were largely Welsh-born and Nonconformist in religion. Thus, they shared the language and the religion of their workers, who were mostly Welsh-speaking and



South Wales coal miners. *The densely populated mining valleys of South Wales in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a notable feature of the British industrial landscape and home to Welsh nonconformity and radicalism.*

almost entirely Nonconformist. Until the twentieth century, when class conflict overcame these bonds, the Welsh middle and working classes shared common ground and ranged themselves against the anglicized and Anglican traditional elite. The Welsh industrial enclave, concentrated so densely in South Wales, was therefore thoroughly Welsh in culture to the end of the nineteenth century.

Yet English influence grew relentlessly. English, after all, was the language of the government, the courts, education, the professions, and high-level commerce. As the coal owners grew richer and more established, then, they, too, became more English. At the same time, the work force also underwent a certain degree of anglicization. Scottish and English migrants poured into South Wales, while Welsh coal miners came to understand that they had the same problems as English workers and found their strongest support among English and Scottish trade unionists. Class identity in this sense functioned as a strong pan-British integrative force. By the early 1900s, Welsh miners were holding their meetings in English. Industrializa-

tion, which in its early stages helped preserve the Welsh language and culture, in the long run corroded Welshness.

In the last half of the nineteenth century, however, there was still a high correlation between Welsh-speaking areas and Nonconformist areas: to be Welsh was to be Nonconformist. As we saw in chapter 12, evangelicalism took Wales by storm; the Welsh became people of the chapel rather than the church. By the late nineteenth century, almost 90 percent of the Welsh were Nonconformists, and many of them belonged to the more puritanical sects: Baptists, Congregationalists, and Calvinistic Methodists. The Church of England (the established church in Wales) had made little attempt to reach out to the people at large: the first Welsh-speaking bishop in more than a century was appointed only in 1870. As one Welsh Anglican said: "Churchmen in Wales were comprised almost exclusively of the richer portions of society . . . so that they had in Wales a church kept up for the rich man at the expense of the poor majority."

Welsh popular culture revolved around Nonconformity. Chapel vestries dominated their communities, offering chapel members social opportunities, adult education, Sunday schools, and above all choirs to sing in. Nonconformists imposed their Sabbatarianism on Wales, making the Welsh Sunday peculiarly bleak even by Victorian standards. But Nonconformist ministers also were the heart and soul of the literary celebrations of Welsh culture, the annual *eisteddfodau*, both national and local; they were in a sense the new bards, evangelical style.

Participation in the British Liberal party helped keep Welsh Nonconformist radicalism from becoming a separatist movement. Welsh Nonconformists found allies in the Liberal party because the Liberals generally supported the cause of Nonconformists against the privileges of the established church and the claims of the middle class against the landlords. The Welsh Nonconformists did not want independence for Wales, for they believed that the Welsh economy was far too dependent on England's to survive alone. But in the 1880s and 1890s, some militant young Welsh politicians including Tom Ellis and David Lloyd George earned great influence in the Liberal party and won commitment of the party not only to disestablishment of the Anglican church in Wales, but also to Home Rule (a degree of regional autonomy) for Wales.

At the same time, a cultural nationalist movement took root in Wales. It was not separatist, for even Welsh cultural nationalists were comfortable with two patriotisms—British and Welsh. Almost all of the Welsh nationalists of the years between 1880 and 1914 identified themselves as British as

well as Welsh. Their *British* identity pertained to matters external to the British state, whereas their *Welsh* identity concerned things internal to the British Isles. Welsh cultural nationalists such as Owen Morgan Edwards (1858–1920) took pride in the British monarchy and Empire, but they also emphasized Welsh distinctiveness, glorified the allegedly virtuous and independent Welsh peasant, and reveled in the Welsh language. As a schoolboy, Morgan was frequently required to wear the *Welsh Not*, a board that was tied around the child's neck to discourage him from speaking Welsh. Clearly the punishment did not work, for Morgan grew up to become a passionate advocate for the Welsh language.

Cultural nationalists such as Morgan worked to collect and revive Welsh literature, to celebrate the Welsh past, and to save the Welsh language. They urged establishment of a Welsh national museum, library, and university, all of which had been accomplished by 1914. Briefly, in 1894–96, a Young Wales (*Cymru Fydd*) movement attempted to fuse cultural and political nationalism, but interest in Welsh independence was too slight for it to thrive. What Welsh cultural nationalism did achieve was to spread an enduring sense of the Welsh past and of the differentness of Welsh culture. For the time being, that was enough.

SCOTLAND: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE GAELIC REVIVAL

Next to the national revivals in Wales on the one hand and Ireland on the other, the revival in late-Victorian Scotland seems a pale creation. But that is in part because the Scots brought into the period a strong sense of historical identity, one that needed cultivation rather than revival. As a result of centuries of independent existence, followed by the negotiated Union of 1707, the Scots had retained their own established (Presbyterian) church, system of laws and courts, and educational structure. The Romantic movement had revived a sense (admittedly somewhat bogus when it came to kilts and tartans) of historic distinctiveness. Even Lowland Scots came to celebrate Scottish heroes such as Robert Bruce, William Wallace, Mary Queen of Scots, and Bonnie Prince Charlie.

Unlike that in Wales, Scottish cultural identity did not focus on language. The Gaelic language was dying out, as traditional Scottish (that is, Highland) society dwindled rapidly. Gaelic was not taught in the state schools, and cultivation of Gaelic language and literature remained an academic pastime. But as in Wales, political separatism won few adherents. As one statesman said, "No Scotsman, except a handful of Celtic enthusiasts in the Highlands, wants a separate parliament for Scotland."

There was in Scotland, however, a growing sense that Scottish rights within the United Kingdom needed vindication. Following the Irish example (discussed later in this chapter), many Scottish Liberals committed themselves to Scottish Home Rule in 1886. In 1900, some militant Liberals founded the Young Scots Society. The feeling in Scotland that Scottish rights would be protected only if Scotland enjoyed greater regional autonomy produced four Scottish Home Rule bills between 1886 and 1914. None was passed, but in 1885 the British government created the position of secretary of state for Scotland, with supervision over a number of Scottish administrative boards, many of them already in existence. The British also granted fairer distribution of governmental expenditures, and a Scottish Grand Committee, made up of the Scottish members of Parliament (MPs) only, was given limited control over purely Scottish legislation. Thus, a limited degree of *devolution* was established in recognition of the strong Scottish sense of distinctiveness.

At the same time, a Scottish cultural revival reinforced this sense of distinctiveness. The artists, writers, and thinkers of this Gaelic Revival were not backward-looking; instead, they looked to Scottish mythologies and history for inspiration in shaping Scotland's future. City planner Patrick Geddes



The Charles Rennie Mackintosh dining room at the Hunterian Gallery in Glasgow. Like William Morris, Charles Rennie Mackintosh refused to accept any distinction between art and craft, and sought to use design to make life more beautiful.

(1854–1932), for example, pioneered the concept of *region* in architecture and design. He urged planners and architects to look to the locality and to the culture of the people who actually would live in their plans and designs. Similarly, architect and artist Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868–1928) used Celtic motifs and influences to design clean-flowing modernist furniture, jewelry, and buildings.

IRELAND: FROM THE DEVOTIONAL REVOLUTION TO THE HOME RULE MOVEMENT, 1850–1890

Celtic cultural nationalism blossomed most vigorously in Ireland, but here it intertwined with various outcroppings of political nationalism. Increasingly in Ireland, Britishness and Irishness stood as opposing identities.

One important factor in shaping Irish national identity was the mid-nineteenth century *devotional revolution*—a revitalization and Romanizing of Catholic worship. Led by Archbishop Paul Cullen (1803–78), the Irish Catholic hierarchy built new churches and convents, raised the standards of the parish clergy, and multiplied and regularized religious services. Cullen looked to Rome for guidance and spread practices that were popular in the Vatican: novenas, the rosary, and so on. The Irish Catholic laity became one of the most devout Catholic populations in the world. Ireland produced a surplus of priests and nuns, many of whom carried Irish Catholicism to the English-speaking world. Strongly conservative, Cullen opposed militant Irish nationalism. Nevertheless, his policies tightened the bond between Irish Catholicism and Irish nationalism; “faith and fatherland” was his ideal—that is, to be a patriot was to be a Catholic.

In the decades after the Famine and the collapse of Young Ireland (see chapter 15), Irish political nationalism swung between two poles: one was constitutional and devoted to parliamentary action, and the other embraced revolutionary violence. In the 1850s, some Irish MPs founded the Independent Irish party, hoping to defend the rights of Irish Catholics and to win some security for Irish tenants. Able to claim no more than a small minority in the British Parliament, it soon fell apart. By the end of the 1850s, constitutional politics had reached a dead end.

The nationalist pendulum now swung to a new revolutionary society—the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), or Fenians (so-called because of the legendary warrior band, the *Fianna*). The IRB sought the overthrow of British rule by force and the establishment of an independent and nonsectarian Irish republic. Operating as an underground terrorist organization, it

was quickly penetrated by British agents. In 1865, British authorities shut down the Fenian newspaper and arrested many IRB leaders. In 1866, about six hundred American Fenians “invaded” Canada but were easily forced back across the border. Finally, in 1867 the remaining IRB leaders in Ireland defiantly staged a rebellion before they could be arrested. It was quickly suppressed. After 1867, Irish nationalism swung back to the constitutional path, but the IRB continued to carry out attacks, such as bombing Scotland Yard in 1883, and to build up a network of support among Irish-American emigrés who had carried their memories of the Famine and their hatred of the British across the Atlantic.

The constitutional effort that overshadowed the IRB was the Home Rule movement, founded by Isaac Butt (1813–79), a Conservative Irish barrister who believed that revolution in Ireland would surely occur if the legitimate grievances of the Irish people were not settled. His solution was neither independence nor repeal of the Union, but Home Rule: Ireland would have its own Parliament for Irish affairs, yet would be subordinate to the Parliament at Westminster. In the general election of 1874, the new Home Rule party, founded only four years before, won 59 of the 105 Irish seats in the House of Commons. Butt did his best to persuade the British Parliament to accept Irish Home Rule, but he did not succeed. To the British, Home Rule, no matter how restricted the powers of an Irish Parliament might have been, was simply a plan to turn over Ireland and its Protestant population to papists and to split the Empire at its core.

Home Rule party members soon grew impatient with Butt’s politics of persuasion. They advocated the tactics of confrontation—specifically, to obstruct the proceedings of Parliament. If Britain, they said, would not let Irishmen rule Ireland, then the Irish would not let Parliament rule Britain. Between 1877 and 1880, one of the advocates of the confrontational approach—the more forceful and militant nationalist, Charles Stewart Parnell—supplanted Butt as leader of the Home Rule movement.

Parnell (1846–91) was, along with Daniel O’Connell, one of the two towering figures in nineteenth-century Irish nationalism. A Protestant landlord and a man of icy demeanor, Parnell achieved an iron discipline over the Home Rule party and an almost magical hold on the imagination of the Irish people. The secrets of his success were his personal charisma, his supreme self-confidence, his passionate dislike of England, and his political ruthlessness. By refusing to bend to English will and yet staying just inside the boundaries of the law, Parnell managed to bind together the constitutional and the revolutionary wings of Irish nationalism. He simultaneously won



Charles Stewart Parnell, the charismatic and tough-minded leader of the Irish Home Rule movement.

control over the Home Rule parliamentary party and the organized force of militant tenants in Ireland, the Land League, as well as the support of the IRB. The Parnellite Home Rule movement became a constitutional (if aggressive) parliamentary force backed up by agrarian agitation and violence at home.

In 1881, William E. Gladstone's Liberal government responded to the unrest in the Irish countryside with a Land Act that addressed many tenant grievances and effectively made tenants co-owners of their farms. At the same time, however, the Liberal government also passed a *coercion act* (one of over a hundred such acts passed by British governments between 1801 and 1920) that denied Irish activists the right to trial by jury. And in 1882, when Parnell declared that the Land Act did not go far enough and encouraged further agrarian agitation, Gladstone used the coercion act to arrest Parnell and confine him in Kilmainham Gaol outside Dublin.

Imprisoning Parnell proved a huge mistake. It simply added "martyr" to his long list of nationalist credentials and encouraged further unrest across Ireland. Later that year, Parnell and Gladstone reached an agreement according to which the Irish leader would be released and the Irish tenants would receive additional relief, in return for Parnell's support of the Land Act. Called the Kilmainham Treaty, this agreement highlighted Parnell's political clout.

This clout became even more apparent in 1885, when Parnell returned to his confrontational politics in hopes of forcing one British party or the other to grant Home Rule. In that year's general election, he instructed Irish voters living in Britain to vote Conservative, his aim being to bring about a deadlock in the House of Commons, to which the Home Rule party would hold the key. As luck would have it, the election results *did* hand him the balance of power: neither party would be able to form and sustain a government without the support of the eighty-six Home Rulers. Parnell would be able to turn out of office one cabinet after another. Appalled by this fundamental threat to the British constitution, Gladstone concluded that the Liberal party must back Irish Home Rule.

As we will see in chapter 21, this commitment to Home Rule was the most dramatic event in late-Victorian politics. It forced through a realignment of Britain's political parties, but it did not achieve Home Rule. Twice, in 1886 and in 1893, a Liberal government introduced Home Rule bills, at great electoral cost to the Liberal party, and twice they were defeated. By the time the second Home Rule bill was rejected, however, the Liberal-Home Rule alliance had collapsed and Parnell was dead.

The fall of Parnell became a tragedy of mythic proportions in Irish popular culture. As the so-called Uncrowned King of Ireland, Parnell seemed invincible. Then, in 1889, his long-term affair with Kitty O'Shea, wife of a member of the Home Rule party, was revealed. Parnell's adultery was intolerable to both the British Nonconformists, who made up the backbone of the Liberal party, and to the Irish Catholic bishops, who exerted a great deal of political influence in Ireland. The Catholic clergy hounded Parnell, and the Liberals demanded that the Home Rule party depose him. After a bitter fight, the party majority did the Liberals' bidding. Parnell, however, refused to step down and so split the movement he had helped create. His health destroyed, Parnell died in 1891 and so took his place in the pantheon of Irish national martyr-heroes.

IRELAND: LITERARY RENAISSANCE AND CULTURAL NATIONALISM, 1890–1914

With the Irish Home Rule party bitterly divided, British politicians were able to put Home Rule on the back burner. Instead, the Conservative governments of 1886–92 and 1895–1905 decided to “kill Home Rule with kindness.” The key to their Irish policy was land purchase: by a series of laws culminating in Wyndham's Act of 1903, the British government

loaned money to Irish tenants on very favorable terms so that the tenants could buy their holdings from the landlords. Wyndham's Act also gave the landlords bonuses to sell out. By 1920, the old problem of landlordism in Ireland had been eliminated.

By the early twentieth century, however, the Irish desire for some kind of national autonomy was so wide and deep that it could not be killed with kindness by this or any British government. There had taken root in late-Victorian Ireland a *cultural* nationalism that could not be satisfied with material progress. One aspect of this cultural revival was *Celticism*, a pro-Celtic reaction against the Anglo-Saxonism prevalent in late-Victorian England. Celtic history, fairy tales, and folklore were told and retold to recall the supposed excellence of ancient Celtic society and to celebrate legendary heroes such as Cuchulain and Finn MacCuchail. Historian Standish O'Grady's *History of Ireland* (published in 1878–80) opened up to the Irish imagination the lost realms of Celtic culture and literature. O'Grady portrayed the Irish peasants as racially pure, morally virtuous, politically democratic, and instinctively heroic—all in sharp contrast to the stolid and unimaginative *Sassenmachs* (the English).

The organization that popularized the values of the Celtic revival was the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). Established in 1884 by Michael Cusack (1847–1906), an Irish-speaking teacher of civil service candidates, the GAA aimed to replace English games such as cricket and soccer with Irish games such as hurling and Gaelic football. By attracting young men into Irish-style (and often extremely rough) games, the GAA developed a fierce local and national pride and anti-English attitude. Inevitably, these emotions had political consequences: support for the more aggressive varieties of nationalism. In 1891, for instance, two thousand GAA hurlers marched in Parnell's funeral as an expression of approval of his final defiance of the English. The IRB quickly infiltrated the ranks of the GAA and recruited widely within it.

The intellectual and scholarly aspects of the Irish Celtic revival found expression in a host of antiquarian, literary, and folklore societies. The most important of these was the Gaelic League, established in 1893. Its leading figures were Eoin MacNeill (an Ulster Catholic) and Douglas Hyde (a southern Irish Protestant). Their objectives were to preserve the Irish language, to extend its use among the people again, and to cultivate a new literature in Ireland. The term *Irish-Ireland* summed up their philosophy. Hyde gave voice to it in a famous lecture called "The Necessity of de-Anglicizing Ireland." He argued that Irish men and women were stuck in a "half-way house"

between Irish and English culture: they hated the English, but imitated them. Only if the Irish deliberately cultivated Irish literature, customs, games, names, and above all language would they be able to sustain a distinctive Irish national identity. By 1910 the Gaelic League had made significant progress on the cultural front. Although by then the Irish language was spoken by only about 12 to 13 percent of the Irish people, Irish was being taught for the first time in Ireland's state schools, and Irish was now required for entry into the new Irish National University (established in 1908).

It is somewhat ironic, then, that the great literary revival that blossomed in Ireland between 1880 and 1914 was not in Irish, but in English. The movement revolved around a close-knit band of writers who turned to Celtic history and culture for inspiration. Because most of these writers were members of the Anglo-Irish elite, many scholars regard the Irish literary renaissance as a product of *post-colonialism*: a profound attempt by the colonists to come to terms with the culture of the colonized. Whatever the explanation, their conscious objective was to create, as Professor F. S. L. Lyons wrote, "a modern Irish literature in English."

All of the leading figures in the Irish literary revival struggled with the opposing claims of nationalism and artistic creativity. Playwright J. M. Synge (1871–1909), for example, sought to render the rhythms and patterns of the Irish language into English and so to preserve the unique beauty of Irishness. But in his two most well-known works, *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903) and *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), Synge also portrayed the Irish peasants as they really were, warts and all. Advocates of Irish-Ireland and Catholic nationalists alike found the reality unacceptable, for they idealized the peasantry. As one Irish-Irelander declared, "All of us know that Irish women are the most virtuous in the world;" he refused to let Synge, or the newly founded Abbey Theatre, say otherwise.

The tension between nation and art was also pronounced in the career of the poet W. B. Yeats (1865–1939). A believer in magic and the occult and in the reality of a supernatural world, Yeats was drawn both to the premodern outlook of Irish folklore and to modernist symbolism. He was a political as well as cultural nationalist, with connections to the IRB; his play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902) led one playgoer to wonder whether such patriotic plays should be produced "unless one was prepared for people to go out and shoot and be shot." But Irish nationalism, which demanded the artist's total commitment, proved too restrictive of Yeats's creativity. The nationalists' criticism of Synge's plays repelled Yeats, who thereafter tended to adopt an aristocratic disdain for the common, "vulgar" features of Irish culture.

James Joyce (1882–1941), one of the most innovative of modernist writers, reacted even more strongly against conventional Irish life. Joyce left Ireland for the Continent in 1904 and never returned. He also abandoned Catholicism and took up literature as his vocation. He believed Irish culture—or at least Dublin culture—to be paralyzed and paralyzing: priest-ridden, whiskey-soaked, intellectually degraded, and politically hypocritical. Yet he set all his important work in Ireland, including the highly experimental novel *Ulysses* (1922). In it, as in all his mature work, Joyce managed to combine symbolism with realism and mimicry with experiment in the use of language. In the process he painted an indelible portrait of the culture of the Irish nation.

IRELAND: NEW EXPRESSIONS OF POLITICAL NATIONALISM, 1890-1914

The Irish cultural revival proved to be inseparable from politics. The strong sense of Irish nationality reinforced political ideas of national self-reliance, and these ideas led to political organization. First, in 1900 the Home Rule party, so disastrously divided after Parnell's fall, re-united under the leadership of John Redmond (1856–1918). Over the next decade, the party once again emerged as a powerful parliamentary force and the demand for Home Rule again dominated Irish political nationalism.

The Home Rule party, however, now had a new rival. Beginning in 1898, self-reliance was expressed as an ideology under the banner of *Sinn Féin* (ourselves alone) by journalist and intellectual Arthur Griffith (1872–1922). Griffith wanted not only to establish an independent Irish literature, history, and language, but also to free Ireland from economic and political dependence on England. He proposed policies of economic self-sufficiency and political separation for Ireland, and by any means possible: “Lest there might be a doubt in any mind, we will say that we accept the nationalism of '98, '48 and '67 as the true nationalism and Grattan's cry ‘Live Ireland—perish the Empire!’ as the watch-word of patriotism.” This attitude put Sinn Féin, formally established as a political party in 1905, squarely in the extremist tradition of Irish nationalism, as opposed to the more moderate constitutionalism of the Home Rulers.

At about the same time, the urban working class of Dublin began to organize along militant nationalist lines. The central figures were James Larkin (1876–1947) and James Connolly (1868–1916), two syndicalist union organizers who set up the Irish Transport Workers Union (TWU). By violent agitation and strikes, the Dublin workers won a number of concessions from

their employers, but in 1913 they lost an extended and bitter conflict with the United Tramway Company of Dublin. The main British union council, the Trades Union Congress, which had its own battles to fight and which was leery of the syndicalism, failed to give sustained support to the Irish TWU. In reaction, the Irish workers became more nationalist than socialist in their outlook. In that heated atmosphere of both increasing class conflict and nationalist militancy, Connolly formed a small force to defend the union men against the police: the Irish Citizen Army. In 1914, the "Army" committed itself to a radical socialist and nationalist principle: "The ownership of Ireland, moral and material, is vested in the people of Ireland."

This was revolutionary talk. Against the whole militant nationalist movement there stood by 1914 an equally militant loyalist sentiment: *Unionism*. Partly in reaction to Gaelic cultural nationalism and partly in response to Belfast's burgeoning industrial economy, Protestants in Ulster developed a strong Unionist identity that saw itself as an outlying fortress defending the British Crown and the Protestant Church in a backward and hostile land. They thus regarded as sacrosanct the Act of Union that created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801. Unionism took deepest root in the substantial number of Scottish Protestants first planted in Ulster in the seventeenth century. Though Protestants constituted the majority in six of Ulster's nine counties (and about half the Ulster population as a whole), these Scotch-Irish were well aware that they accounted for only 20 percent of the Irish people. The Protestant *Orange Order* became the heart and soul of Ulster Unionist resistance to Home Rule. When the first Home Rule bill was proposed in 1886, the Orange Order declared that the old struggle between Catholics and Protestants for control over Ireland had been revived. To Orangemen, Home Rule meant "Rome Rule."

With Home Rule back on the parliamentary agenda in the early 1900s, Unionism grew stronger. James Craig (an Ulsterman) and Sir Edward Carson (a southern Irish Unionist) organized the Ulster Unionist Council to arouse opposition to Home Rule. Even in the 1880s, many Unionists had openly spoken of resisting Home Rule by force of arms. In 1886, English Conservative Lord Randolph Churchill (father of Winston Churchill) declared, "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right." By 1912, at least the first half of that declaration seemed prophetic. That year almost half a million Ulster Protestants signed a Solemn League and Covenant to use any and all means to defeat the creation of a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland; many of those who signed did so in their own blood. In 1913, with Home Rule due to be implemented the next year, the Ulster Unionist Council recruited a



An Ulster Unionist demonstration. *In the middle is the Unionist leader, Sir Edward Carson. The Ulster Protestant Unionists were implacably opposed to Home Rule for Ireland and would have opposed its implementation by force if necessary.*

paramilitary force of one hundred thousand men—the Ulster Volunteer Force—to defend the Union with Britain, even if it meant armed rebellion against the very British state to which they were pledging their loyalty.

In reaction, Home Rule advocates, led by Gaelic League founder Eoin MacNeill, formed their own military force. These Irish Volunteers grew from 10,000 men to 180,000 by September 1914, and like the GAA, were rapidly infiltrated by the IRB. Civil war in Ireland seemed inevitable. This impending disaster was a severe challenge to the British state and political system, which already were facing major crises at home and abroad.

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Chapter 21

Politics and the State, 1867–1914

By 1914, the mid-Victorian political balance and sense of consensus had frayed to the breaking point. Relative economic decline, demands for a radically expanded electorate, class antagonism, the women's movement, and Irish Home Rule each challenged the British state in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods—and sometimes all at once. The record of response was mixed: British politicians and statesmen responded to some of these issues effectively, but on others they moved ineffectively or not at all. The process of coping with the challenges of the period altered the political system in ways that no one in the 1860s could have anticipated: extra-parliamentary parties grew in importance, Ireland caused a realignment of parties, and the working class claimed direct representation in Parliament.

THE REFORM ACT OF 1867

The British political system of the 1850s and 1860s was not, and was not supposed to be, democratic. It was intended to represent stable, responsible individuals who had a stake in society—educated and propertied men. The Reform Act of 1832 had given the vote to about 800,000 men in England and Wales. By the 1860s, inflation, prosperity, and population growth had increased the number of electors to about 1 million in England and Wales and over 1.3 million in the United Kingdom as a whole—one in twenty-four of the population.

When the Great Reform Act passed in 1832, many parliamentary leaders, Whig and Tory alike, insisted that it constituted the final revision of the political structure. Desire for further parliamentary reform, however, had never died away. It had been kept alive by ex-Chartists and by middle-class radicals who hoped that an additional dose of reform would destroy the aristocracy's grip on political power. Liberal MP John Bright, a Quaker, whom Tennyson had called the "broad-brimmed hawker of holy things," argued that parliamentary reform would purify the state by checking the self-interest and

irresponsibility of the aristocracy: "The class which has hitherto ruled this country has failed miserably. . . . If a class has failed, let us try the nation!"

Although most of the governing elite rejected this attack against the aristocracy, they came around to the idea of parliamentary reform as prosperity and social peace worked their magic. Even the prominent Whig Lord John Russell, known as "Finality Jack" in 1832, came to accept the argument that progress in the economy and education had created more "responsible" men among the populace, and that by the logic of 1832, responsible men were entitled to the vote. William E. Gladstone (1809–98), a rising force in the Liberal party, agreed. He believed that the Lancashire cotton workers had displayed their moral fitness for the vote when they supported the fight against slavery even as the American Civil War disrupted the supply of raw cotton to British mills and created mass unemployment in northern textile towns. In 1864, Gladstone declared that "every man who is not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal fitness or of political danger is morally entitled to come within the pale of the constitution." Such arguments, however, meant little as long as the immensely popular and powerful Lord Palmerston was alive: this popular politician opposed extension of the franchise beyond the limits set in 1832. But once Palmerston died in 1865, the forces of reform were unleashed.

Reformers in the Parliament of the 1860s were not moved by fear of revolution (as many had been in 1830–32), but by the relative social peace of the time. Working-class reformers reinforced this spirit of accommodation by moderating their own claims. The main working-class reform organization, the Reform League, spoke for the comparatively well-off and respectable skilled workers, the same people who had successfully founded the moderate craft unions of the mid-Victorian years. The League sought limited extension of the franchise rather than universal suffrage, and advocated it not as a right but as a privilege that had been earned. Working-class reformers cooperated readily with radical intellectuals and with provincial Nonconformists such as Bright on the objective of breaking the power of the landowners. As one radical journalist, John Morley, declared, the issue was between "brains and numbers on the one side and wealth, vested interest, rank and possessions on the other."

The growing consensus favoring parliamentary reform set into operation the dynamics of party rivalry in the House of Commons. Because a reform act by the mid-1860s seemed inevitable, Liberal and Conservative leaders alike wanted to be able to take credit for it and tailor it for party advantage. The Liberal government of Lord John Russell (with Gladstone as

leader of the House of Commons) introduced a moderate reform bill in 1866. A small number of the more cautious members of the Liberal party defected to the opposition, and the Conservatives, led by Benjamin Disraeli (1804–81), opposed the bill in order to be able to seize the initiative themselves. This combination defeated the bill, and the Liberal cabinet resigned from office. Outside the House, popular demonstrations in favor of reform erupted, including one that broke down railings in Hyde Park, but there was nothing like the dangerous popular movement of 1831.

The Conservative government that took office needed little pressure to sponsor its own reform bill. Although a minority of Conservatives believed that any extension of the franchise would create an inferior electorate, most thought that because parliamentary reform could not be avoided, the Conservatives should take charge and pass a safe measure. Disraeli, the Conservative leader in the House of Commons, believed that the Conservatives could survive in a more democratic future, but not if they condemned themselves to a role of sullen opposition to popular measures. He also needed a victory to consolidate his own leadership of the Conservative party, and he desperately desired the delightful experience of beating his rival Gladstone. Disraeli's objective, therefore, was to pass whatever reform bill he could. The details he cared little about; parliamentary victory was what counted.

Disraeli's brilliant management of his reform bill of 1867 steered the fine line between his own party, which opposed any extreme measure, and the radical wing of the Liberals, which would have defeated any moderate bill. His strategy was to introduce a moderate bill and then to accept radical amendments while taking care to defeat those presented by Gladstone. One by one, Disraeli accepted amendments that stripped away reservations, leaving an act that gave the vote to all urban householders. The Second Reform Act passed finally in August 1867. It was Disraeli's triumph; on returning home after victory in the wee hours of the morning, he found his wife had prepared for him a meat pie from the elegant shop Fortnum and Mason and a bottle of champagne. "Why, my dear," he said, "you are more like a mistress than a wife."

THE IMPACT OF THE 1867 REFORM ACT

The Reform Act of 1867, and the accompanying redistribution of seats, did not usher in democracy or even universal manhood suffrage, but it did make for very substantial changes—"a leap in the dark," as one Conservative described it. The act expanded the electorate from 1.3 to 2.5 million, so that

one in twelve of the population (or one of three adult males) had the vote. Skilled workers now for the first time formed the majority of borough voters. The well-to-do, however, were protected by *plural voting*, for the act provided that a man could vote in every constituency in which he met the property qualification. Some wealthy property owners might cast as many as ten votes. (An amendment proposed by J. S. Mill to give votes to women was rejected.)

Further changes followed the Second Reform Act. In 1872, the secret ballot was introduced, followed by the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883. This legislation, along with the sheer size of most constituencies, brought about the gradual end of the traditional expenditure of vast sums of money to bribe voters. Then in 1884 and 1885, the dynamics of party rivalry produced further measures of reform and redistribution. The Third Reform Act (1884) extended the householder franchise from the boroughs to the counties, increasing the electorate to 5.7 million, or one in every six of the population. The Redistribution Act of 1885 met Conservative concerns by dividing the country generally into single-member constituencies of approximately equal size, an arrangement that preserved safe seats for the Tories. From 1884 to 1918, then, a householder franchise for males only, but not yet universal manhood suffrage, prevailed in Britain. In the 1880s, for the first time, the middle class outnumbered the traditional landed elite in Parliament.

In the wake of the 1867 Reform Act and the subsequent reforms, three developments helped create a new political structure. First, party discipline within the House of Commons grew tighter as politicians responded to the public's rising expectation of parliamentary legislation. Cabinets found they needed to control business in the Commons more tightly and to marshal their parliamentary forces more efficiently. During the years between 1867 and 1900, the frequency of pure party votes grew rapidly. The day of the old-fashioned independent MP was over.

Second, political parties became a much more important part of local culture. The increase in the urban electorate prodded both parties to contest all constituencies in general elections. Moreover, the two parties found that they had to organize aggressively in each borough in order to win their share of the two or three seats. Full-time professional party agents in each constituency now became the keys to electoral success. Local party organizations sprang up. Supported by both politicians and party agents, these constituency associations engaged in recreational as well as electoral activities; thus, in late-Victorian Britain, party politics in the form of picnics, football teams, and brass bands became an important part of popular culture.

Finally, as a result of the challenge presented by the massively enlarged electorate, extra-parliamentary party “machines” were established. In the Conservative party the impetus came from the top down. As early as 1867, Tory politicians founded a federation of Conservative constituency organizations—the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations. In addition, parliamentary leaders established the Conservative Central Office to function as the party headquarters. This central bureaucracy controlled the National Union and also the Primrose League, a highly effective network of political clubs for party volunteer workers, including a large number of women. Together with the Conservatives’ superior wealth, these organizations served as useful electoral instruments. Hence, the Conservatives were able to appeal to the respectable middle class as well as to the landowners, and even to win consistently some 30 percent of working-class voters.

On the Liberal side, the party organization grew from the bottom up. Middle-class Nonconformist grievances had produced a number of national, voluntary, single-issue organizations patterned on the old Anti-Corn Law League: the United Kingdom Alliance (temperance), the Peace Society (pacifism), the Liberation Society (disestablishment of the Church of England), and the National Education League (free, nonsectarian state education), among others. These Nonconformist societies, with their main strength in the Midlands and North of England and in Scotland and Wales, were united by their common antipathy to Anglican landlords and by their underlying aim of turning Britain into a middle-class, moral society. Their members were attracted naturally to the parliamentary Liberal party, which had maintained the traditions of parliamentary reform, civil liberties, free trade, and religious freedom. They also felt an instinctive admiration for the intensely religious and moralistic Liberal leader, Gladstone. Provincial middle-class Nonconformity, therefore, attached itself to the Liberal party.

In Wales in particular, Nonconformist religion and Liberal politics came together in a potent blend. Almost 90 percent of the Welsh population was Nonconformist, and both popular and political culture in Wales revolved around the chapel. Once male urban householders received the vote in 1867, Welsh radical Nonconformity powered a political steamroller. Allied with the British Liberal party, Welsh radicals won twenty-nine of thirty-two Welsh parliamentary seats in 1880, and at least that many in every election until 1922. Welsh Nonconformity formed one of the big battalions in the late-Victorian and Edwardian Liberal army.

In Scottish politics as in Welsh, liberalism and the British Liberal party exerted overwhelming dominance in the second half of the century, and again religion played a crucial role. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, evangelicals within the established (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland had fought the moderate ruling body over a number of issues, most notably patronage. (The evangelical Presbyterians insisted that each congregation could call its own minister, whereas the moderates supported the right of patrons to appoint the ministers.) Finally, in 1843, the evangelicals split off to form the Free Church, taking about 40 percent of the clergy with them. The Disruption, as this event became known, shook up Scottish life and gave a boost to Scottish liberalism. The Free Church spread rapidly and Free Churchmen increasingly called for the disestablishment of the Church of Scotland. The demand for disestablishment aligned naturally with the Liberal party's reformist agenda, as did middle-class Scots' predictable opposition to the overmighty Scottish landlords.

GLADSTONE AND DISRAELI

Late-Victorian Britain was highly politicized, and everyone, whether in the Celtic countries or in England, seemed to be a partisan. In one of the delightfully satirical operettas that he wrote with Arthur Sullivan, W. S. Gilbert claimed

That every boy and every gal
That's born into the world alive,
Is either a little Liberal
Or else a little Conservative!

Daily newspapers such as the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Daily News* of London, as well as the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Leeds Mercury*, and the *Sheffield Independent*, gave full coverage to political news and quoted parliamentary speeches at length. This politicization of literate Britain was a sign not only of the rise of parties, but also of the classic duel between the two great party leaders of the period, Benjamin Disraeli and W. E. Gladstone. Masters of parliamentary debate, these two giants of the House of Commons were enabled by the expanded electorate, the rise of the political press, and the shrinking of Britain by the railways to become *national* party symbols.

The two titans could hardly have been more different: it was as if a playful deity had designed each of them to challenge and irritate the other. Gladstone was the model of Victorian religiosity and rectitude, a man who regarded his career in politics as God's calling. In contrast, the flamboyant and witty Dis-



The Great Rivalry: *Cartoon from Punch in 1872 depicting Disraeli (front) and Gladstone as two opposing lions making speeches in Lancashire.*

THE LANCASHIRE LIONS.

"SO HAVE I HEARD ON INKY IRWELL'S SHORE,
ANOTHER LION GIVE A LOUDER ROAR,
AND THE FIRST LION THOUGHT THE LAST A DORE."

Humiliated Persians.

raeli regarded politics as a great game. When he became prime minister in 1868, he proclaimed, "I have climbed to the top of the greasy pole." The two men loathed each other. Disraeli described Gladstone as a "maniac" who was driven by an "extraordinary mixture of envy, vindictiveness, hypocrisy and superstition," whereas Gladstone believed that under Disraeli's leadership the Conservative party had lost all purpose and principle.

The son of a wealthy Liverpool businessman, Gladstone combined traits of both Liverpool and Oxford: unparalleled mastery of government finance, a commitment to individual liberty, and a profound (if somewhat eccentric) devotion to the classics and theology. Under the surface, he was a man of prodigious energy and passion, so torn by self-doubt that he sometimes whipped himself for having experienced temptations of the flesh. Blessed with a strong and beautiful speaking voice, he excelled in both parliamentary debate and platform oratory. He also had a strong sense of personal destiny, which prompted one critic to say that, although he did not object to Gladstone's always having an ace up his sleeve, he *did* object to Gladstone's belief that God had put it there!

Gladstone's career was a long march from High Church Toryism to ardent Liberalism. His first speech in the House of Commons (1833) was a defense of his father's slave-holding interests in the West Indies. In the 1830s and 1840s, he distinguished himself by his advocacy of the privileges of the established Church of England. But his severe sense of duty and public service aligned him with Sir Robert Peel, and he never forgave Disraeli for his attacks on Peel in 1846. With the other Peelites, Gladstone drifted into the Liberal party. His liberalism flowered in his advocacy of financial retrenchment, which he saw as limiting the power of the state, and in his emotional sympathy for oppressed nationalities abroad. To him, Britain should always act as a moral force for good in the world. His moralistic approach to politics attracted the Nonconformists of England, Wales, and Scotland, to whom he became a heroic figure. Over time, Gladstone became convinced that the ordinary people had a greater capacity for virtuous public behavior than the landed elite, who, he believed, looked out only for their own self-interest.

Although Disraeli outmaneuvered him in 1867, Gladstone and the Liberals won the first general election (1868) held after passage of the Second Reform Act. Gladstone became prime minister for the first of four times (1868–74, 1880–85, 1886, and 1892–94). His first ministry was by far the most successful, for it rode the crest of a united party to act on many long-standing Liberal concerns. Its many legislative victories included two important measures meant to address Irish grievances: disestablishment of the Anglican Church of Ireland (1869) and a land act (1870) aimed at giving Irish tenants a degree of security of tenure. These measures did not resolve what was becoming known as the Irish Question, but the Gladstone government was more successful in other areas. It rationalized the legal system, abolished purchase of commissions in the army, introduced competitive civil service exams, ended religious tests at Oxford and Cambridge, gave trade unions legal recognition for the first time, and established (by W. E. Forster's Education Act of 1870) the first state school system in England.

This was nineteenth-century Liberalism at its best, but each of these acts seemed to alienate one segment of Liberal support. In particular, Forster's Education Act infuriated many Nonconformists because it incorporated existing Anglican schools in the new state system. Moreover, some of the more cautious Whigs and upper-middle-class men grew concerned about the government's activism, and they began a slow drift of propertied people away from Liberalism that was to go on for nearly fifty years. Thus, the Liberals lost the general election of 1874, and Gladstone resigned from the leadership and announced his retirement from public life.

Gladstone's archrival now held the top position in the British parliament. The son of a Jewish man of letters, and himself an incurable romantic, Disraeli was the most improbable success story in Victorian political history. Though he was baptized as an Anglican at age thirteen, Disraeli was always proud of his Jewish heritage and was a courageous advocate of admitting Jews to Parliament (finally granted in 1858). This position was unpopular with the Conservative party, and besides, Disraeli was not a member of the landed elite whom he sought to lead. Furthermore, Disraeli was much too flamboyant, too melodramatic, and too openly ambitious to be attractive to Conservatives. They never really liked him, yet he had talents they could not do without after the Peelite split: he was devastating in parliamentary debate, a master of political opportunism, and a magician of public gestures and symbols.

Disraeli had first made his reputation as a novelist, and some historians see in these novels his political agenda. In *Coningsby* (1844), for example, Disraeli asserted that there is a natural alliance between aristocracy and people, and thus that the Tories were England's natural, and best, rulers. This theme he pushed even more effectively in *Sybil* (1845), which contends that England had become two nations, the Rich and the Poor, and that political leaders had a duty to bridge this gap. Some historians argue, then, that in these novels we find Disraeli's hopes for a "Tory Democracy" and that in the Second Reform Act and in the social reforms passed by his government of 1874–80 we see its implementation.

Other historians have found little evidence for this view. They point out that Disraeli ran on a platform in 1874 of giving people relief from "incessant and harassing legislation." He had no interest in legislative details and made little effort to lead his cabinet even by stating general principles. To be sure, his government was very successful in passing a number of pieces of social legislation, including legalization of picketing by trade unions (1875), extensions of the Factory Acts, a law to prevent adulteration of food and drugs, and permissive acts allowing towns to build working-class housing (1875) and to improve public health by cleaning up slum areas (1875). Most of these acts, however, were due to the hard work of a middle-class Conservative cabinet member, R. A. Cross, who complained that he got little help from Disraeli.

Yet historians agree that Disraeli helped his party, which might otherwise have faded along with the landed interest, survive in the new democratic age. He showed the Conservatives how to win and how to appeal to new working-class voters. He also made it a comfortable refuge for

commercial and industrial men who, anxious about property, government interference, and public order, gradually drifted away from the Liberals and into the ranks of the Conservatives.

Disraeli's renovation of the Conservative party did not, however, translate into electoral victory in 1880. The Liberals, once again led by Gladstone, returned to power. What brought Gladstone out of retirement was a massive public outcry against Disraeli's pragmatic policy of supporting the Ottoman Empire, despite Turkish massacres of thousands of Christians in the Ottoman province of Bulgaria. This *Bulgarian Atrocities* episode of 1876 not only vaulted Gladstone back from retirement, but it also epitomized the differences between Disraeli's pragmatism and Gladstone's principles. In Disraeli's view, Britain's national interest in propping up the ramshackle Ottoman regime and so blocking any Russian expansion into the Mediterranean region took precedence over any moral obligation to protect Bulgarian Christians. He even joked about the atrocities, saying that reports of torture could not be true because the Turks "seldom, I believe, resort to torture, but generally terminate their connexion with culprits in a more expeditious manner." Outraged at what he saw as Disraeli's lack of principle and at his refusal to use British power for moral purposes, Gladstone weighed in with a powerful pamphlet entitled *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, in which he called for British intervention as a matter of honor. Inspired by Gladstone's moral message, Nonconformists across the North of England held hundreds of protest meetings.

Disraeli, however, refused to act: "Our duty at this critical moment is to maintain the Empire of England." It was only after Russia intervened, defeated the Ottoman forces, and drew up a treaty (1878) seeming to threaten British interests that Disraeli responded—and then he did so with vigor. He sent a fleet to guard Constantinople, called out the army reserves, and had Cyprus occupied. Finding an ally in Austria-Hungary, which also was concerned about Russian intrusion into the Balkans, Disraeli helped bring about the Congress of Berlin, a meeting of the European powers to revise the Russo-Turkish treaty. Disraeli returned from the Congress claiming "peace with honour": Russia was forced to give up much of its winnings, and Britain won possession of Cyprus and retained its dominance in the eastern Mediterranean.

In 1880, however, the Liberals won the general election; Gladstone's moral leadership during the Bulgarian campaign assured him the post of prime minister in the new government. This second government (1880–85)

was not nearly as productive as Gladstone's first. Plagued throughout by intractable problems in Ireland and in the Empire, the government was able to carry little of the Liberal program except the Third Reform Act (1884). The government did not respond at all to Britain's long-term economic difficulties, for the Liberals were too committed to the existing economic system even to consider a change. The government's major achievement was the Irish Land Act of 1881, a measure that sought to quell Irish unrest by resolving tenant grievances. As we saw in chapter 20, however, this legislation did not pacify the Home Rule movement. As we will see below, continued upheaval in Ireland led Gladstone to embrace the cause of Irish Home Rule, but not even the "Grand Old Man" of British politics, as he was known, was able to resolve the long-standing Irish Question.

HOME RULE AND BRITISH POLITICS

In the 1880s and 1890s, Irish issues continually intruded into British politics. Though British politicians wanted to get on with "British" issues, Ireland seemed to take up most of their time. Irish issues such as land reform raised the collective British blood pressure, while the frequent resort to coercion acts taxed the British liberal conscience. For Gladstone, Ireland became almost an obsession. As early as 1868, when Gladstone learned that the queen would ask him to form a government, he responded, "My mission is to pacify Ireland." He tried mightily, but Gladstone's mission failed and his efforts to resolve the Irish Question split the Liberal party.

The main issue was, of course, Home Rule: the demand for a separate Irish Parliament to deal with Irish issues. For most Britons, Irish Home Rule represented the thin edge of the wedge that would lead to the disintegration of the British Empire. But as we saw in the last chapter, by the 1880s, Charles Stewart Parnell and the Irish Home Rule party had succeeded in forcing the issue onto the political agenda by perfecting the techniques of obstructing the business of the House of Commons. Then came the general election of 1885, which gave the Home Rule party the balance of power: eighty-six Home Ruler MPs could turn out of office any government formed by either party. Gladstone, who was by then seventy-six years old and widely expected to retire, concluded that this constitutional predicament was intolerable and that Home Rule must be enacted. He realized that in governing Ireland the only alternative to granting Home Rule was to enact more coercive acts, and he found this both morally and politically

unacceptable. He also believed that only the burdens of self-rule could teach responsibility to the Irish. The Grand Old Man, therefore, decided not to retire until the Irish Question was settled.

This extraordinary decision won Gladstone the support of the Home Rulers, and he came back into office early in 1886 committed to try a Home Rule bill. The bill that he introduced convulsed British politics. It would have removed Irish representatives from the British Parliament and set up a subordinate Irish Parliament in Dublin to deal with strictly Irish matters. Gladstone argued that a measure of local autonomy for Ireland would secure the Empire at its core. Opponents of the bill—including all of the Conservatives, most of the Whigs, and a few radical Liberals—contended that Home Rule would turn Ireland over to people who were little better than criminals and who would persecute the Irish Protestant minority, despoil Irish property, and then separate Ireland completely from Britain. Home Rule thus would damage the Empire at its base.

After two months of impassioned debate, Gladstone's Home Rule bill was defeated in the House of Commons by thirty votes. More than ninety Liberals, including almost all the remaining Whigs, not only voted against the bill but also left the party. In the subsequent general election of 1886, the Conservatives and the newly formed Liberal Unionist party formed a political alliance and inflicted a major election defeat on Gladstone's Liberals and the Irish Home Rulers.

Home Rule thus contributed to a realignment of the British parties. The Liberal Unionists merged into the Conservative party, which now stood unambiguously as the party of the propertied. In turn, the Liberal party became more radical. Nonconformist and radical issues such as church disestablishment in Wales and Scotland, the end of plural voting, and elective parish councils were now promoted to the official Liberal party platform. The Liberal commitment to Irish Home Rule, however, overshadowed this radical program—and Home Rule was never very popular with the English electorate. Gladstone introduced his second Home Rule bill in 1893, and after a tedious repetition of all the arguments that had been heard for eight years, the bill passed the House of Commons, only to be summarily thrown out by the House of Lords. As the Liberal government dithered between campaigning to reform the power of the Lords and trying to pass other items of their program, their support dwindled. Gladstone resigned (for good this time) in 1894 and the Liberal lost heavily in the general election the following year. For the next ten years, the Conservatives held power and the Liberals drifted, divided. For some, Irish Home Rule remained a moral



Liberal leader William E. Gladstone being kicked up in the air over Irish Home Rule by an unusual combination of opponents. From left to right: John Bright, Joseph Chamberlain, Randolph Churchill, Lord Salisbury, and Stafford Northcote.

crusade; to others, it was an electoral millstone around their necks. To many New Liberals, the focus on Home Rule prevented the party from attending to a growing threat from the left: the desire among militant laboring men and socialists for an independent labor party.

NEW UNIONISM AND THE RISE OF LABOUR

After the Reform Act of 1867, the Liberals could count on winning two-thirds of the greatly expanded working-class vote. The Liberals always regarded themselves as a party that spoke for both the middle class and the working class. The allegiance of trade union members to the Liberal party

was especially strong, for these organized skilled workers regarded middle-class Nonconformists, who composed the backbone of the Liberal party, as their allies in the struggle against the Anglican landed elite. The Trades Union Congress (TUC), formed in 1868 by the mid-Victorian craft unions, was closely tied to the radical left of the Liberal coalition. In 1874, two trade unionists (both of them coal miners) won election to Parliament as Liberals. Working men thus had reason to hope, not only that the Liberals would act on their behalf, but also that over time the Liberal party might evolve into a radical, working-class party.

Such an evolution did *not* occur; instead, by 1914 an independent Labour party had set up shop as a rival to the Liberals in claiming working-class votes. Why did this happen? One key factor was the response of middle-class employers to *New Unionism*. In the 1880s, British trade unionism took a radical turn. New Unionism involved both the organization of semiskilled and unskilled workers in industries not organized before and the adoption of much more aggressive tactics by all unions, old and new. In 1889, for example, socialist Tom Mann (1856–1941) helped the dockers, who had always been casual (that is, hourly) laborers, organize and strike for higher wages and more regular work. After a bitter and well-publicized struggle with their employees, the dockers won. Union membership more than doubled, reaching two million in 1901. This and other successes, however, provoked a strong reaction from employers, who throughout the 1890s used various tactics to weaken the unions' legal position.

Many working-class leaders concluded that the only way to defend New Unionism against the employers' counterattack was to represent working-class parliamentary constituencies themselves. In theory, the Liberals could have agreed, but in practice, the wealthy commercial and industrial men who had founded and financed the Liberal associations could not abide this prospect. Few of them liked the eight-hour day, almost none of them accepted socialism, and most of them had their defenses raised by the heated class antagonism of the day. Perhaps it was inevitable, given the revived class consciousness of the period—the strong sense of *them versus us*—that the working class demanded independent working-class MPs.

The career of James Keir Hardie (1856–1915) illustrates growing working-class disaffection from the Liberals. Hardie was a Scottish coal miner, a romantic soul who in the 1880s converted to an ethical, non-Marxist brand of socialism. Like many miners in the 1880s, Hardie became an advocate of the eight-hour workday as a way of expanding employment and improving

working conditions for miners. The refusal of one TUC official who sat as a Liberal MP to accept the eight-hour day earned a blast from Hardie in 1887. The next year, Hardie's local Liberal association turned down his request to stand as a Liberal candidate in a parliamentary by-election (special election) in Mid-Lanarkshire. He ran instead as an independent candidate. Although defeated soundly, Hardie continued to lobby for establishment of independent labor representation at annual meetings of the TUC, and in 1892 he won a parliamentary seat from the East End of London. He was the first independent working-class MP and showed his affiliation by wearing a working man's cloth cap when he took his place.

The first effort by Hardie and other working-class leaders to establish an independent party for labor came in 1893. In the North of England, hard times in coal-mining and cotton mill towns had spawned many labor clubs and working-class socialist societies. Representatives of these organizations, plus the Social Democratic Federation, the Fabian Society, and a few trade unions, met in Bradford in January 1893. They formed the Independent Labour party (ILP), which vowed to "secure the collective ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange." The ILP attracted a number of men and women passionately devoted to ethical socialism, people who were to serve for many years as the conscience of the British left, yet the ILP was too idealistic and its leaders too individualistic ever to become a mass party. The foundation of an effective party for labor would depend on the trade unions.

Despite their traditional attachment to the Liberals, many trade unions began to move toward foundation of a workers' party in the latter 1890s because of the employers' offensive against the New Unionism. Legal action and lockouts by employers against trade unions gradually persuaded union leaders that the Liberals, many of whose MPs were the very employers that they faced, would give the unions little satisfaction. In 1900, representatives of trade unions, the ILP, and a number of small socialist societies set up the Labour Representation Committee (the LRC), which eventually became the Labour party. Its founding resolution said nothing about socialism and little about policy: the LRC's task was simply to promote in Parliament the interests of labor.

The LRC did not automatically claim the allegiance of all trade unionists, still less the support of all working-class voters. Many of the biggest unions, including the coal miners, refused to affiliate. In the election of 1900, only two LRC candidates won seats in the House of Commons. The turning point came in 1901 with the famous—or, from the workers' point

of view, the infamous—Taff Vale decision. After a strike on the Taff Vale railway in South Wales, the company sued the union, and the House of Lords ruled in favor of the company that unions were liable for damages in a strike. This decision made strikes impossible, and convinced many trade unionists that an independent working-class voice in Parliament was an immediate necessity. More than 120 unions now joined the 41 that had already affiliated with the LRC, and the party's electoral fund grew rapidly.

The potential electoral clout of the LRC concerned the Liberal party leadership. The Liberals did not wish to split working-class votes with the LRC and so give up seats to the Conservatives. Liberal leaders consequently struck an electoral bargain with the LRC in 1903: where possible, Liberal and LRC candidates would avoid contesting the same constituencies; in return, Labour MPs would support a future Liberal government. This *Lib-Lab pact* allowed the LRC to win twenty-nine seats in the general election of 1906. Shortly after the election, the LRC members of Parliament elected their own whips and took the name of the Labour party.

The Labour party did not, however, embark on any steady rise to power. Labour MPs decisively influenced only one piece of legislation, the Trades Disputes Act (1906), which reversed the Taff Vale decision, gave the unions legal immunity from suit by employers, and thereby sanctioned strikes and picketing. The Liberal party seemed to hold the initiative and Labour representatives to serve only as the tail on the Liberal dog. In the country at large, however, two crucial developments were taking place: first, the number of union affiliations with the Labour party was growing along with union militancy; second, at the local level, the Lib-Lab electoral pact was breaking down. Both trends promised big trouble for the Liberals, and at just the time when wealthy property owners were shifting from the Liberal to the Conservative party.

THE TRIUMPH OF NEW LIBERALISM, 1906–1910

The Conservative party ruled Britain almost continuously from 1886 to 1905. Popular concern about Britain's international standing and the threat of socialism worked to the benefit of the Conservatives, who were the party of Empire and private property. In the early years of the twentieth century, however, the Conservatives divided over an intensely emotional issue—tariff reform. In 1903, the colonial secretary Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914) declared himself in favor of a tariff duty on imports. Chamberlain, a radical



Joseph Chamberlain speaking in favor of tariff reform. The former leader of the radical wing of the Liberal party became a key figure in early twentieth-century conservatism. Here he argues that a tariff would not raise the cost of food significantly.

leader who led the Liberal Unionists out of the Liberal party, was a dominant figure in British politics, and free trade held almost sacrosanct status in Britain; Chamberlain's declaration, then, was stunning. He proposed to give preferential treatment to the colonies on their farm exports to Britain and so to tie the Empire more closely together, as well as to use tariffs on manufactured goods to both protect British industry and finance social reforms. Chamberlain's tariff reform constituted a bold and comprehensive strategy, but many Conservatives were devout free traders and tariffs on farm imports were especially unpopular because they would raise the price of food.

The Liberal party rode the unpopularity of tariffs (their slogan promoted the "big loaf" of cheap food versus the Tories' "little loaf") back into power. The general election of 1906 was in fact a Liberal landslide, with the

Liberals, Labour, and Home Rulers winning a majority of 355 over the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists.

The election of 1906 marked a particular triumph for New Liberalism. The New Liberal luminaries in the new administration included H. H. Asquith (1852–1928), who served as chancellor of the exchequer from 1906 to 1908 and then as prime minister; David Lloyd George (1863–1945), a Welsh radical and energetic opportunist who became chancellor of the exchequer under Asquith; and Winston Churchill (1874–1965), who had come over to the Liberals because of the tariff issue. Together, these New Liberals enacted a remarkable series of social reforms, including, in 1906, an act to permit local authorities (local governments) to provide school meals for poor children, the establishment of old age pensions in 1908 to remove the stigma of pauperism from the growing number of workers who lived to old age, and the creation of labor exchanges in 1909 to improve the mobility of labor and so tackle the problem of unemployment. In 1909 the Liberals also passed the Trade Boards Act, setting up boards to fix wages in the so-called sweated industries such as tailoring and lace making. The capstone of the New Liberal legislation came in 1911 with the National Insurance Act of 1911, which provided protection against workers' sickness and unemployment in certain major industries. Both the unemployment and sickness benefits were built on the insurance principle: workers contributed from their pay while employed and received benefits while unemployed or ill. Employers and the state also made contributions.

The body of social legislation passed by the Liberals between 1906 and 1911 reflected a New Liberal consensus that the state should ameliorate the worst symptoms of poverty and inequality, but did little to attack the roots of the problem—unemployment, falling real wages, and the inability of workers in some industries to make a living wage. The Lloyd George budget of 1909, however, was truly radical. As chancellor of the exchequer, Lloyd George in 1909 boldly designed a budget aimed not only at financing New Liberal social programs, but also at forcing the landed elite to pay for what he regarded as unearned privileges. His budget of 1909 thus raised death duties (inheritance taxes on estates), increased the rate of graduation on income taxes, added a *supertax* on incomes over £5,000, and—most controversial of all—put taxes on land values. The tax rates of the Lloyd George budget by later standards were not high, but the People's Budget, as the Liberals called it, clearly endorsed the radical principle of transfer payments—that is, the wealthy paid taxes that were transferred to the poor through social programs.

Lloyd George's budget caused a major uproar and led to a constitutional crisis. The budget passed in the House of Commons, but the Conservatives, who labeled it as socialistic, used their huge permanent majority in the House of Lords to defeat it. The Lords' veto raised a serious constitutional issue: could the House of Lords, which was not responsible to the electorate, refuse to fund the elected government? "That way," Asquith warned, "revolution lies." In December 1909 the Liberal majority in the Commons resolved that the rejection of the budget by the Lords was "a breach of the Constitution and a usurpation of the rights of the Commons" and called a general election for January 1910. Although their majority was sharply reduced, the Liberals won that election; the Lords accepted the verdict of the electorate and passed the budget. The Liberals, however, were now determined to curtail the power of the House of Lords.

THE TRIALS OF LIBERALISM, 1910–1914

The start of the second decade of the twentieth century thus ushered in an especially turbulent time in British politics. In addition to its fight with the Lords, the Liberal government faced off against militant suffragettes, trade union unrest, an increasingly truculent Conservative party, and nationalist and Unionist violence in Ireland. The consensus of the mid-Victorian years seemed to be collapsing and the effectiveness of Parliament weakening. One historian, George Dangerfield, labeled the period as "the strange death of liberal England"—not the death of the Liberal party, but the end of a political culture in which Liberalism could flourish.

The battle over Lloyd George's People's Budget convinced many Liberals that the time had come to embark on further parliamentary reform, this time aimed at the House of Lords. In April 1910, therefore, Asquith introduced a reform that would end the Lords' authority over budgets and restrict their power over other bills to a two-year delay. The Parliament Bill readily passed in the Commons. Asquith knew that the Lords would now reject it, entailing yet another general election. He prevailed on the new king, George V, to promise to create enough Liberal peers to pass the bill if the Liberals won the election—which they did. The Asquith government proceeded with the Parliament Bill and the lords now faced the prospect of seeing their august chamber swamped with middle-class men.

The resistance of many Conservative Lords, and of Conservatives in general, now reached a fever pitch. "Ditchers"—Lords who would resist curtailment of their power to the last ditch—tussled with "hedgers"—those who

would reluctantly accept some reforms in order to keep the social status of the peerage undiluted. The Liberals pressed on resolutely and the hedgers prevailed. The bill reforming the Lords' power passed into law in August 1911.

Asquith's Liberal government, however, had little time or space to celebrate the victory as they faced the expanding suffragette challenge (see chapter 18). Enraged by parliamentary inaction on women's suffrage, suffragettes turned to disrupting the public appearances of Liberal politicians, as well as defacing property and assaulting cabinet ministers. The Liberal government responded by arresting suffragettes and, when the women went on hunger strike, by subjecting them to ghastly force-feeding. All of this pressure seems to have stiffened Asquith's resolve against granting votes for women on the grounds that violence must not be rewarded.

Yet Asquith was more accommodating to the trade unionists, who were raising the heat in the nation at the same time. In 1910, for example, a violent strike in the South Wales' coal fields required the government to dispatch troops to the area, and in the summer of 1911, a dockers' strike caused outbreaks of violence in London. Later that same summer, railwaymen went on strike; troops were required to keep order in London, and several union members were killed. Keir Hardie declared: "The men who have been shot down have been murdered by the Government in the interests of the capitalist system." The Liberal government, however, did not simply send in the soldiers; increasingly both the public and the politicians expected governments to mediate between employees and trade unionists. Already in 1908, strikes in coal mining had led to legislation limiting the miners' workday to eight hours. When, early in 1912, the coal miners went on strike for a minimum wage, the Asquith cabinet rushed through emergency legislation to grant it. The Liberals also sponsored other legal changes aimed at pacifying the unions. In 1911 the Liberal government passed legislation allowing for the payment of MPs (a big help to the Labour party) and giving trade unions the right to contribute funds to the Labour party (provided only that union members be allowed to "contract out," that is, to refuse that portion of their dues that went into the political fund).

Nevertheless, labor unrest continued to escalate. The rise in prices and the corresponding decline in the real wages, plus the militancy of the trade unions and the stubbornness of most employers, generated more and more violence. Nearly forty-one million workdays were lost to strikes in 1912. And the situation promised to worsen: in 1913–14, the miners, railwaymen, and dockers took up a proposal to form a Triple Alliance of mutual support in industrial disputes.



Soldiers in Liverpool. In 1911, the Liberal government deployed troops to put down industrial unrest in this key port city.

As if the obstreperous behavior of the Lords, suffragettes, and trade unionists was not enough, the Liberals now faced unreasonable and unconstitutional behavior by the Conservatives and Ulster Unionists over Irish Home Rule. The issue of Home Rule had always been lurking behind the controversy over the reform of the House of Lords. The Conservatives knew that if the power of the upper House was limited, then Home Rule could be enacted; it was, after all, the Lords' veto that had killed Home Rule in 1893. The Home Rule party reunited in 1900 and helped bring the Liberals into office in 1906. After the general elections of 1910, the very survival of the Liberal government depended on Home Rulers' votes in the House of Commons. As expected, then, Asquith introduced the third Home Rule bill in April 1912, and this time it would pass into law because the reformed Lords could only delay it for two years.

The seemingly sure prospect of Irish Home Rule drove Ulster Unionists to extremes of opposition. They prepared to resist Home Rule by all means necessary. Andrew Bonar Law (1858–1923), a Canadian of Scotch-Irish ancestry who had succeeded Balfour as leader of the Conservative party, fully supported the Unionists in their belligerence. "I can imagine," Bonar Law declared, "no length of resistance to which Ulster can go in which I should not be prepared to support them." This was to hint at civil war, for which the Ulstermen were preparing. In early 1913, the Ulster leadership set to arming and drilling the Ulster Volunteer Force to fight against the

implementation of Home Rule. Irish nationalists responded by forming their own paramilitary force, the Irish Volunteers.

By the end of 1913, Ireland was well on the way to civil war. Asquith faced the real possibility of having to use British troops to force Home Rule on the most fanatically loyalist part of the Irish population, the Ulster Unionists. And the army itself was not reliable. In 1914, officers at the Curragh military post in Ireland resigned rather than prepare to march against Ulster. Asquith felt he had no choice but to recognize the power of Ulster's claim. He suggested an amendment allowing Ulster counties with Protestant majorities to opt out of Home Rule for six years. He was unable, however, to bring the Home Rulers and the Unionists to agreement.

In any event, external events soon overwhelmed all such political maneuvering: Britain was enveloped by war in Europe. Home Rule passed into law, but it was suspended for the duration of the war. For the time being, divisive issues had to take second place to urgent matters requiring national unity; Ireland, labor unrest, women's suffrage, and Conservative obstruction all receded into the background. The First World War thus saved Britain from bloody civil conflict, but at a price too horrible to contemplate.

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Chapter 22

The British Empire and the Coming of War, 1870–1914

The years from 1870 to 1914 are rightly known as the Age of Imperialism. During that half-century, European domination of the world reached its highest point as the states of Western Europe (and later the United States and Japan) expanded their imperial holdings around the globe, carving up Africa, seizing Pacific islands, and establishing claims in Asia. By any measure, Britain was the leading power in that imperial thrust. The British began the late-Victorian period with the biggest empire by far and then expanded fastest. The British Empire stood in 1914 as the largest empire the world had ever known and as an inspiration—and source of envy—to the other Western nations.

Yet the same years from 1870 to 1914 also witnessed the beginning of the end of the *Pax Britannica*, for real British power eroded relative both to the power of other nations and to Britain's ability to fulfill its global commitments. In the early twentieth century, Britain consciously withdrew from its role as the world's policeman, at least in certain areas. Likewise, the erosion of British power ended Britain's *splendid isolation*. These trends—imperial expansion and erosion of power—though apparently contradictory, were in fact opposite sides of the same coin. Together, they explain how Britain drifted into a war in 1914 that was nearly to end Britain's status as a great power.

THE IMPERIALIST IDEA

In the years between 1870 and 1914 the British Empire expanded at a breathtaking rate. Areas that had been part of the *informal empire* (see chapter 17) came under formal rule and new areas were annexed. In 1871, the Empire included 235 million people and almost 8 million square miles;

in 1900, it encompassed 400 million people and 12 million square miles—almost one-fourth of the earth's land surface. Yet just as important as expansion itself in designating these years as the Age of Imperialism was the elaboration of an imperialist ideology. Through most of the nineteenth century the British had increased their imperial holdings, but had lacked a positive rationale for empire. As one statesman said, the colonies seemed to have been acquired "in a fit of absence of mind." But from the 1870s, new foreign rivalries and economic pressure caused the British not only to expand aggressively, but also to formulate imperialism as an idea.

British imperialism was a strange compound of confidence and anxiety. The more confident element arose from long-standing pride in British achievements overseas and above all in British governing institutions. People of all parties shared this feeling. As an editorial in the *Times* (1867) put it, "We are all proud of our empire, and we regard our Colonies and dependencies as the various members of such a family as earth never yet saw." This pride was consistent with the view of the so-called Little Englanders, exemplified by William Gladstone, that as the colonies of white settlement grew to maturity they would drop like ripe fruit off the imperial tree. Increasingly in the late nineteenth century, however, the Little Englanders' outlook came to be rivaled by the imperialists' notion that the colonies should be bound more closely to Britain. In 1872, Benjamin Disraeli, in a famous speech at the Crystal Palace, committed the Conservatives to protection of the nation's institutions and preservation of the Empire. From that point on imperial consolidation came to be associated with the Conservative party, though there were Liberal imperialists who believed in it as well.

Pride in the Empire included a sense of trusteeship that all members of the governing elite could share. The British regarded themselves as the new Romans, especially talented in the techniques of government and bringing material progress to backward peoples. Justifiably proud of their parliamentary system, they believed that they had much to offer the world. Around the Empire, declared the colonial secretary in 1878, "we have races struggling to emerge into civilization, to whom emancipation from servitude is but the foretaste of the far higher law of liberty and progress to which they may yet attain." The British governing class was confident in Britain's ability to carry out this mission of noble trusteeship. Joseph Chamberlain, perhaps the most eminent imperialist politician, put it bluntly in 1895: "I believe that the British race is the greatest of the governing races that the world has ever seen."

The more anxious and defensive side of imperialism arose from the perception that Britain was locked in a global economic and political rivalry with other states. According to the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1885:

In times past . . . we did what we pleased, where we pleased, and as we pleased. All that has changed. . . . At every turn we are confronted with the gunboats, the sea lairs, or the colonies of jealous and eager rivals.

Imperialists believed that “pegging our claims” around the world would enable Britain to stay ahead of these rivals. In addition, they argued that British national interests demanded self-sufficiency through empire: securing of imperial possessions as markets and investment opportunities for British goods and capital, and cultivation of colonies that would assist Britain in global rivalries, including war.

Christianity also played an important role in the imperialist idea. Many Britons equated the forward march of the Union Jack with the Christianization, and thereby, they believed, the spiritual salvation of the world. The late-Victorian era was in many ways the high noon of the British missionary movement, with older missionary societies expanding and new organizations proliferating. The Anglican Church Missionary Society, for example, grew from 250 to 1000 missionaries between 1880 and 1900. Throughout the nineteenth century, missionaries had served as the vanguard of an expansionist British culture, although at the same time often acting as sharp critics of imperialist abuses. Britain’s missionaries aimed to Christianize rather than anglicize the world, and many of them sought desperately to respect the cultural integrity of the societies they entered. But in their conversionist efforts, missionaries wielded what historian Jeffrey Cox has described as the “three great battering rams”: education, women’s outreach to women, and Western medicine.¹ These battering rams could not help but smash through indigenous customs and contribute to the advance of British cultural institutions and values.

Social Darwinism contributed even more to the imperialist idea. For Social Darwinists, the struggle for empire mirrored the wider struggle among races for supremacy and even survival: “The truth is,” one imperialist wrote in 1896, “that what we call national rivalry is to all intents and purposes part of the universal scheme that makes Nature ‘red in tooth and claw.’” Many Social Darwinists believed that the British had to achieve greater *social efficiency* to survive in international competition. Social

¹Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise Since 1700*, 217.

Darwinists shared a widespread concern about the potential degeneration of what they called “the British race”; thus, oddly enough, many imperialists were also social reformers. Some Social Darwinists such as mathematician Karl Pearson (1857–1936) put their hope in eugenics; others, such as the sociologist Benjamin Kidd (1858–1916), argued for reforms including improved education and nutrition to produce stronger and healthier potential soldiers. Likewise, they hoped to inculcate through sports and paramilitary organizations habits of order and discipline. The cult of school sports, the Boy Scouts (founded in 1908), and the spread of numerous cadet brigades were all results of the quest for social efficiency and thereby national supremacy. As the Social Darwinists put it, the struggle was racial:

The facts are patent. Feeble races are being wiped off the earth, and the few, great incipient species arm themselves against each other. England, as the greatest of these—greatest in race-pride—has avoided for centuries the only dangerous kind of war. Now, with the whole earth occupied and the movements of expansion continuing, she will have to fight to the death against successive rivals.

As this passage shows, the racist quality of imperialist thought was ambiguous: imperialists tended to be both anxious about the quality of the so-called British race and confident of Britain’s racial superiority. One Fabian socialist said, “If we are breeding the people badly, neither the most perfect constitution nor the most skillful diplomacy will save us from shipwreck.” Yet at the same time imperialists believed that the British or “Anglo-Saxon race” (note the exclusion of the Celtic peoples) was naturally superior to black, brown, and yellow races (not to mention Slavic, Mediterranean, and Celtic peoples), and that this justified rule by the British. Indeed, they thought, the “colored” races were childlike and incapable of ruling themselves, whereas the British stood at the top of the evolutionary mountain. The *Daily Mail* caught this racial pride in exclaiming about the white troops in the Jubilee parade of 1897: “every man such a splendid specimen and testimony to the Greatness of the British race . . . the sun never looked down until yesterday on the embodiment of so much energy and power.”

Racial pride and the sense of Britain’s unique governing ability enabled British imperialists to think of imperialism as a duty rather than as a naked expression of economic and political power. Psychologically this was very important. All over Britain, upper middle-class and professional families sent their sons out to the Empire in the spirit of sacrificing self-interest to a noble burden. This helps explain why British administrators in fact set such a high standard of fairness and incorruptibility, if not cultural sensitiv-

ity. Rudyard Kipling evoked the spirit of duty perfectly in his “White Man’s Burden” (1899):

Take up the White Man’s Burden—
 Send forth the best ye breed—
 Go bind your sons to exile
 To serve your captives’ need.
 Take up the White Man’s Burden—
 And reap his old reward:
 The blame of those ye better,
 The hate of those ye guard.

Racial pride, noble sacrifice, religious faith, global struggle, heroic adventures, faraway exotic places—all constituted a heady brew that affected popular emotions more than did New Liberalism or socialism. In addition, imperialists had an instinctive sense of public relations. They used the new state schools to inculcate imperial pride: every child learned to recognize the pink or red areas on the map as *ours*, while history textbooks glorified the exploits of soldiers, sea captains, and explorers. Mass-circulation newspapers celebrated jingoism, and cheap literature for children linked imperialism with patriotism. *The Boy’s Own Paper* and dozens of other magazines played on related themes of athleticism, militarism, violence, and empire. The most famous writer for the youth market, G. A. Henty, thrilled a generation of boys with his eighty-two novels, many of which purveyed an imperial ideology and celebrated the superior vigor, initiative, decency, and pluck of the British race. The monarchy itself became identified with empire: in 1876, Parliament granted Queen Victoria the title empress of India, and in 1887 and 1897 the queen’s jubilees treated the London masses to spectacular parades of British and imperial troops. Just how far working people accepted the ideas behind imperialism is subject to debate, but it seems clear that imperial patriotism was an important counterbalance to class hostilities.

GREAT POWER RIVALRIES AND IMPERIAL EXPANSION

Intensified great power rivalries fueled the accelerated imperialist drive after 1870. In these years, the international environment became much more difficult and dangerous for Britain than it had been for half a century. In Europe, the formation of united nation-states in Italy and Germany in 1870–71 upset the balance of power and created new competitors for Britain. Although hampered by economic backwardness in its southern region and by imperfect national cohesion, Italy began to industrialize and by 1913 supported significant naval and military forces. The much more

potent Germany industrialized at a very rapid rate after 1870, especially in coal, iron, steel, electricity, and industrial chemicals. Drawing on a rapidly growing population of 49 million in 1890 (compared to 37.4 million for Britain) and on the Prussian military tradition, Germany was bound to play a central role, not only in European but in world affairs. By the mid-1880s, Germany began to acquire colonies in Africa and the Pacific and to expand German influence in the Middle East. The German government became aggressively imperialistic, believing that the superiority of German culture warranted imperial rule and the struggle for survival among the great powers demanded it.

Overseas, the emergence of Japan and the United States as world powers radically altered the international order. Japan, which for centuries had been an isolated and feudalistic country, modernized by strong state leadership after 1868. Consciously imitating the Western nations, Japan borrowed techniques from both the British navy and the German army. By 1895, Japan had become a major power in the Pacific. Its development, however, was dwarfed by that of the United States, which experienced unprecedented demographic, agricultural, and industrial growth after the end of the Civil War in 1865. Occupied through the 1880s with the task of conquering a continent, the United States began to assert itself overseas only toward the end of the 1890s. Even after the Spanish-American War, the United States preferred to act independently and to remain outside European entanglements. But by 1900, many Europeans, including British statesmen, believed that in the future giant states like the belatedly but rapidly industrializing Russia and the United States might dominate the world.

Unnerved by these great power rivalries, the British turned to empire. From the 1870s on, Britain gained a remarkable number and variety of colonies. These included Zanzibar (1870), Fiji Islands (1874), the Transvaal (1877, 1900), Cyprus (1878), Bechuanaland (South Africa, 1884), Somalia (East Africa, 1884), Kenya (1885), New Hebrides (South Pacific, 1887), Rhodesia (1888–89), Uganda (1889), Sudan (1898), and Tonga (South Pacific, 1900). Many of these were acquired during the so-called scramble for Africa in the mid-1880s. The European states codified the partition of Africa at a congress in Berlin in 1884–85, when they declared that any European state could acquire a piece of Africa simply by occupying it and notifying the other powers.

Despite the public popularity of imperialism, many of the leading British statesmen of the period were reluctant imperialists. British officials knew that annexation of territory was expensive. They much preferred informal to



Imperial rivalry: the European powers and the United States show their envy over British imperial possessions.

formal control, and when forced to annex a piece of land, they preferred protectorates and spheres of influence to direct rule, wherever possible. Gladstone and much of his Liberal party were positively hostile to imperial expansion; Gladstone devoted his famous Midlothian electoral campaigns of 1879 and 1880 to a crusade against Disraeli's "forward policy." But neither Gladstone nor any other respectable politician opposed the Empire itself, and everyone agreed that the government had to protect what Britain already owned and even to secure, by force if necessary, British interests around the world. Thus, for example, Britain added Egypt to its empire on Gladstone's watch. After an Egyptian army revolt in 1881, worries about the security of the Suez Canal (Britain's main route to India since its construction in 1869) led Gladstone to order British troops to occupy Egypt. In fact, between 1880 and 1885, the Liberals expanded the Empire at the rate of 87,000 square miles a year—a far faster pace than the Conservatives recorded between 1874 and 1880.

At the same time, the Empire was profitable for the officials who ran it—approximately 6,000 people—and provided employment for the 120,000 troops who patrolled it. It was rightly observed that the Empire was a source of employment—"a vast system of outdoor relief" (that is, welfare)—for the

landed class. Increasingly, families of the civilian and military rulers of the Empire formed a self-conscious element within the British ruling elite, with influence at home as well as overseas. Many investors and businessmen also profited from the Empire, most notably those involved in financing and developing colonial agriculture, mining, and public utilities. Their imperial profits went largely to investors from the upper class, while the British public at large had to pay the taxes that supported Britain's administration and defense of the colonies. Because even the white settlement colonies such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were reluctant to share these costs, Britain's expenditures amounted to a subsidy paid to the colonials by the British taxpayers. In this sense, we can say that the British colonies exploited the mother country! The dominions (as the white settlement colonies were increasingly called) refused to contribute to Britain's military forces or to bind themselves in advance to support British foreign policy. It soon became apparent that the ties of empire between Britain and the self-governing colonies would be limited, as Lord Salisbury said, to "mutual good will, sympathy, and affection." India alone functioned as an ideal imperial possession (from the British point of view): not only did India take an increasing portion of British exports, but also Indian taxpayers were required to pay for their own government and defense, and for an Indian army that was used to expand British imperial might elsewhere.

The rapid colonial expansion of the European powers brought them into conflict with each other. Britain faced competition with Germany in the Pacific, China, Southwest Africa, West Africa, and East Africa. In each case, German intrusion into the colonial scramble threatened some prior arrangements favoring British interests. In general, the British reacted by staking out their own claims and then reaching agreements with Germany by which each recognized the spheres of influence of the other. The most important example of this process occurred in East Africa, where the British thought that German imperialism threatened the headwaters of the Nile River—and therefore Egypt. To prevent that eventuality, the British claimed Uganda in 1888–89, and in 1890 they traded to Germany the small North Sea island of Heligoland in return for German recognition of British control of Uganda.

British colonial conflict with the French seemed as or even more dangerous than rivalry with Germany. The French dreamed of establishing a North African empire across a broad belt of territory running east and west from the Sahara to the Red Sea. They were also angry about Britain's occupation of Egypt in 1882. For Britain, control of Egypt required control of the

Nile south of Egypt; thus, British and French interests clashed in the vast territory of the Sudan.

The British already had a major emotional investment in the Sudan. In the early 1880s, the Sudan was subordinate to Egypt, but the revolt of a puritanical Muslim sect led by Mohammed Ahmed (“The Mahdi”) had ended effective Egyptian rule of the area. In 1884, Gladstone recognized the collapse of Egyptian control in the Sudan and sent a British general, Charles “Chinese” Gordon, to withdraw the last Egyptian forces from that desert wilderness. Alas, Gordon was a religious fanatic and a megalomaniac as well. He disobeyed his orders to withdraw, found himself besieged in Khartoum, and was slaughtered along with his garrison by the Mahdi in 1885. Gladstone came under fierce criticism by an outraged British public, but his government completed the withdrawal anyway—one of the few instances of a British decision to give up territory during the age of imperialism.

But then, in the 1890s, the French sent an expedition under Captain Jean Marchand to occupy the Sudan. This roused the British lion to fresh action. Policy making lay in the hands of Robert Cecil, third marquess of Salisbury (1830–1903), who succeeded Gladstone as prime minister in 1886 and dominated British external policy almost continuously until his retirement in 1902. To counter the French advance in the Sudan, Salisbury’s government in 1898 dispatched a much larger force led by Sir Herbert Kitchener southward from Egypt. Along the way, Kitchener’s army took revenge on the Sudanese dervishes for Gordon’s death, killing eleven thousand of them at Omdurman in less than five hours. According to Winston Churchill, who took part in the battle, it was “the most signal triumph ever gained by the arms of science over barbarians.” Moving on up the Nile, Kitchener arrived at Fashoda a few days after Marchand. In Paris and London, tensions were high; war loomed as a distinct possibility. Forced to withdraw, the French nursed their bitterness against Britain for half a decade.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR, 1899–1902

The most serious colonial conflict Britain faced, however, was not with any European state, but with the white settlers of Dutch descent in South Africa—the Boers or Afrikaners. This conflict resulted in Britain’s biggest war between the Crimean War and the First World War, and it revealed Britain’s isolation and weakness. In this regard, as in the moral and political conflict it provoked at home, the Boer War was for Britain what Vietnam was later to be for the United States.

The conflict between Briton and Boer arose from different ideas of which white population should dominate southern Africa. The two peoples also differed in their views of the native African peoples: the British held a more paternalistic view and believed in theory at least that the black African could be civilized, whereas the Boers believed that the Africans were an irretrievably inferior race. Racial views, however, did not prove to be the cause of war. The issue ultimately at stake was who would rule in the area. In 1837–38, Afrikaner farmers had trekked northward out of the Cape Colony to escape British rule. They established two republics, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, that were effectively independent of British control.

As British imperial ambitions heated up, they were increasingly inclined to impose British rule over the whole area. In 1877, an official of Disraeli's government annexed the Transvaal and got away with it, partly because the Transvaalers were concerned about the well-organized Zulu military power that lay to their east. But when the British army defeated the Zulus in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, it also eliminated the Transvaalers' need for the British. The Transvaalers revolted and dealt the redcoats a nasty defeat at Majuba Hill in 1881. Gladstone lived up to his moral opposition to the use of force for imperial expansion by giving independence to the Transvaal. But the settlement was left ambiguous, for the British still claimed *suzerainty*—an undefined degree of power—over all of southern Africa.

The discovery of gold in the Transvaal in 1886 threw this shaky settlement between Britons and Boers into turmoil. The gold mines quickly turned the Transvaal into a prosperous state. By the 1890s, the Transvaal was buying modern weapons from abroad, mainly from Germany. These developments meant that one day the Transvaal instead of the Cape Colony might dominate southern Africa. This prospect horrified British imperialists such as Cecil Rhodes (1853–1902). A self-made millionaire, Rhodes indulged in fantastic dreams of British colonial dominion over all of Africa, much of the Middle East, the Pacific islands, and commercial settlements on the coasts of China and Japan. He even imagined that the United States could be recovered for the British Empire. To Rhodes, Britain had to have a huge empire to ensure employment for Britain's "surplus" population. "If you want to avoid civil war," he said, "you must become imperialists." Among Rhodes's dreams was a British railway running through British territories from the Cape to Cairo.

For Rhodes and for many imperialists including the colonial secretary Joseph Chamberlain and the British high commissioner in South Africa, Lord Alfred Milner, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal stood as major



Southern Africa at the End of the Nineteenth Century. Although defeated by the British in the South African War of 1899–1902, the Afrikaners (or Boers) became a dominant political force in the Union of South Africa, which joined the formerly Afrikaner states of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State with the Cape Colony.

obstacles on the road to Britain's glorious imperial destiny. They sought to spark a war that would enable Britain to remove these obstacles once and for all. After years of rising tensions, British imperialists got the war they wanted in 1899. The South African War (1899–1902), however, did not proceed the way they expected: the Boer army of less than fifty thousand sharpshooters put up a spirited fight against the British army of some four hundred thousand men.

The war passed through three phases. In the first (October 1899 to January 1900), the Boers inflicted several embarrassing defeats on stupidly commanded British forces, and they laid siege to Kimberley, Mafeking, and Ladysmith. In the second phase (the rest of 1900), the British, now effectively led by Field Marshall Lord Roberts and General Kitchener, defeated



Boer riflemen at the siege of Mafeking during the Boer War. Such troops punctured the pride of the vaunted British army.

the Boer army and relieved the three besieged towns. By December 1900, the British thought the end of the war was in sight. In reality, it was only entering the third phase (1901–02), in which the Boers resorted to hit-and-run guerrilla tactics. The British had no luck in cornering the Boer commandos and resorted to systematic sweeps through Boer territory to deny the support of the populace. British troops burned hundreds of farms and herded the population into concentration camps, in which about twenty-five thousand Afrikaners and at least fourteen thousand black Africans died of disease and malnutrition. Finally, the war closed with the Peace of Vereeniging in 1902, by which the Boers recognized British sovereignty, and the British promised eventually to restore self-government to the Boers. (The British promise was fulfilled in 1907, when the Orange Free State and the Transvaal recovered their autonomy within the British Empire. In 1910 the two Boer states joined the Cape Colony and Natal to form the Union of South Africa, a self-governing dominion.)

Both abroad and at home the South African War, called the Boer War at the time, did Britain's reputation little good. The spectacle of Britain's inability to put down the little army of Afrikaner citizen-soldiers damaged Britain's image of invincibility in the minds of European statesmen. In Britain, the war divided the Liberal party (and much of the British public). The pro-Boers, including the anti-imperialist section of the Liberal party led by the Gladstonian John Morley and the Welsh radical David Lloyd George, inveighed against the immorality of the whole affair, whereas the Liberal imperialists backed the war effort without flinching. The Conservative

government won a big victory over the Liberals in the “khaki election” of 1900 when the war was going well, but in the long run the Boer War further eroded British confidence.

BRITAIN AND EUROPE: FROM ISOLATION TO ALLIANCE

The South African War brought to a head a number of concerns that had been growing since the 1870s about Britain’s relative weakness in world affairs. The unification of Italy and especially Germany, and the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in Europe, had destroyed the balance of power. From the 1870s on, each great power pursued its own interests and security vis-à-vis all the others through an intricate and shifting system of alliances, from which Britain sought to remain aloof. But by the end of the South African War, British policy makers began to feel strongly that as an isolated power they could no longer defend vital interests and therefore that alliances with other powers were needed.

At the core of the alliance system were two sources of conflict: the hostility between France and Germany (a result of Germany’s annexation of the French provinces of Alsace and Lorraine in 1871) and the rivalry of Russia and Austria-Hungary for influence in the Balkans. The latter rivalry was made possible by the fact that the Ottoman Empire was such a decrepit empire that it could not control its Balkan provinces. As for the former problem, to protect Germany from French revenge, German chancellor Otto von Bismarck sought to isolate the French by building alliances against them. In 1879 he formulated the Dual Alliance with Austria-Hungary, to which Italy was soon added (the Triple Alliance of 1882).

The French all this time stewed in their bitterness against Germany. Although no longer the dominant nation on the Continent, France was still a great power. The French went to great lengths to field a huge conscript army—over half a million men before 1900. The French economy was modernizing at a moderate pace, and in the 1880s and 1890s France acquired an empire in North and West Africa and in Indochina. But an empire was no substitute for power in Europe; consequently, the French persisted in their effort to find an ally against Germany. Finally, in the 1894 they succeeded in reaching an understanding (*entente*) with Russia. The entente of 1894 quickly developed into a military alliance.

For Great Britain, the Franco-Russian entente represented a combination of their two rivals of longest standing—a serious situation for a nation that was growing uneasy over imperial rivalries and relative economic

decline. With a population four times as large as Britain's, Russia had a standing army in 1900 of more than a million men. The tsar's government was driving forward Russian industrialization and pushing to expand Russian influence in the Balkans, to control the straits at Constantinople between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, and to extend Russian power into Persia and Afghanistan. Such Russian pressures made for incessant clashes, not only with the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary in eastern Europe, but also with Britain in the Middle East.

The British remained capable of supporting huge military forces, but with an economy devoted to industry and overseas commerce, they preferred to stay with their tried-and-true principles: free trade, overseas investment, low taxes, no conscription, a small army, and a naval force second to none. In the 1870s, the British army stood at about 200,000 men (130,000 at home and the rest in India)—a force smaller than that of Germany, France, or Russia. The Indian army, officered by the British, added another 200,000 men; it was this army that sustained British power in southern Asia and the Middle East.

The British navy, in contrast, was by far the most powerful in the world. Determined to protect the Empire and far-flung trade, Britain regularly increased budgetary outlays on its navy. In the 1870s, the Royal Navy was larger than the navies of the *next three* powers (France, Russia, and the United States) combined. In their quest to maintain naval supremacy, however, the British faced two serious problems. First, naval technology (iron and steel armored ships, steam power, screw propellers, and breech-loading naval guns) advanced rapidly, making old ships obsolete and raising the costs of new construction; second, other industrializing powers opted to build modern navies of their own. The French built up their navy in the early 1880s, resulting in a significant “naval scare” in Britain. The British naval budget increased by more than 50 percent between 1882 and 1897, and yet, relative to the rest of the world, British naval strength decreased.

As we have seen, Britain's imperial and foreign policy during this era lay in with Lord Salisbury. A sagacious pessimist and a pragmatic statesman, he realized that Britain's power relative to that of other nations was beginning to deteriorate. Convinced that Britain's continued greatness depended on expansion of the Empire, Salisbury favored inactivity in Europe: as he said in 1887, “Whatever happens will be for the worse and therefore it is in our interest that as little should happen as possible.” Concerned about the growth of the French and Russian navies, Salisbury's government in 1889 adopted the *two-power standard*: Britain's navy would always be larger than

those of the next two powers combined. Otherwise, Salisbury avoided broad permanent alliances.

The South African War, however, called into question Salisbury's isolationist policies and heightened concerns about Britain's international standing. In this new and more uncertain era, Conservatives and Liberals alike sought to enhance Britain's military power. With Salisbury's nephew, Arthur Balfour, now prime minister, the Conservative government in 1904 established a general staff for the British army. In subsequent years, the Liberal secretary for war, R. B. Haldane, reorganized the army. He provided that six fully equipped divisions could be sent to Europe on short notice, backed the regular army with three hundred thousand well-trained territorial reservists, and promoted an Officer Training Corps in universities and public schools.

At the same time, British policy makers recognized that the time had come to cut back on some commitments abroad. The tremendous growth of American power, for instance, meant that it was impossible for the British to contemplate a war in North America or to continue their dominant role in the waters of the Western Hemisphere. Hence, the British from the 1890s forward were inclined to settle their differences with the United States largely on American terms. Britain recognized the validity of the Monroe Doctrine and in 1901 conceded to the Americans the right to build and control a canal across the Isthmus of Panama. Within a few years, Britain had withdrawn most of its warships from American waters and left the defense of British interests there to the United States Navy.

Britain's treaty with Japan in 1902 was even more dramatic. Along with Britain and Russia, Japan had become one of the great powers in the Far East. The Franco-Russian entente of 1894 threatened British naval strength in the Pacific, for the combined French and Russian fleets would outnumber Britain's by a wide margin. If the British allied with Japan, they would win security in Asian waters and at the same time be enabled to strengthen the home fleet. In 1902, therefore, Britain and Japan pledged mutual aid should either be attacked by more than one power in Asia. By this treaty, the British gave up their cherished policy of isolation, which no longer seemed so splendid, and set terms in advance under which they would go to war.

At the same time, British policy makers began to effect a quiet diplomatic revolution. They recognized that a colonial agreement with France would greatly enhance British security. The outbreak of war between Japan and Russia in 1904 hurried Britain and France into agreement because neither wanted to be drawn into a Pacific conflict. In April 1904, Britain signed

an entente with France. The entente specifically covered only colonial issues—the British, for example, recognized French control over Morocco while the French did the same with British control over Egypt—but it opened the way for broader cooperation between these two ancient enemies.

Because France was already allied with Russia, the door was now open for completion of a triangle of agreements among Britain, France, and Russia. Thus, after protracted discussions, Britain and Russia in 1907 reached a settlement of colonial disputes: Britain won Russian recognition of Afghanistan as a British sphere of influence; Russia won Britain's agreement not to annex Afghanistan outright; and the two powers divided Persia into zones of influence, Russian in the north and British in the south. By separate agreements, the British admitted that they would not resist eventual Russian control of Constantinople and the straits, and the Russians recognized British control in the Persian Gulf. This settlement with another old rival completed Britain's diplomatic revolution: in place of isolation, the British had now involved themselves in the European treaty system.

THE DRIFT INTO WAR, 1905–1914

Although the ententes between Britain, France, and Russia technically concerned colonial matters, the British statesmen who negotiated them had their eyes on Germany the whole time. The rise of Anglo-German antagonism was one of the key themes, perhaps an unavoidable one, in European history between 1890 and 1914. It explains how Britain's participation in the European treaty system, instead of keeping the British out of a general European war, eventually drew them into one.

The Anglo-German antagonism originated in the development of German rivalry to British supremacy in the world. As early as the 1870s, members of the British ruling elite were expressing concern about the power of the German state, the superiority of the German educational system, and the growth of the German industrial economy. Literary fantasies of German invasion of Britain became popular reading in Britain: *The Invasion of Dorking* (1871), *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903), and *The Invasion of 1910* (1906) to name a few. In the early 1900s this hostility toward Germany became entrenched among the permanent officials of the Foreign Office—most notably Eyre Crowe (1864–1925), the senior clerk, who was troubled by what he saw as the consistently anti-British stance of the German government. By 1907, Crowe's view that Britain must reassert its rights and

power against Germany's policy of expansion was dominant in the policy-making circle of the British state.

The most important source of British antagonism toward Germany was the rapid growth of the German navy. British power rested ultimately in the Royal Navy, and competition on the high seas appeared to threaten Britain's most vital interest. Beginning in 1898, the Germans began building up their navy with the obvious intent of catching up with Britain. Kaiser Wilhelm II and his chief naval planner, Admiral von Tirpitz, decided that a great navy was necessary for Germany to claim its rightful "place in the sun." Successive expansive German naval building programs inevitably threatened British maritime superiority, and Tirpitz aggravated the situation by concentrating a so-called risk fleet in the North Sea—a fleet that the British could not take the risk of failing to cover with its own fleet, and therefore a means of diverting British ships from other oceans. The British might have reached an alliance with Germany on condition that Germany cut back on naval construction. As late as 1912, R. B. Haldane appealed to the Germans on these terms. But the German emperor was adamant: Germany would have a big navy because all great nations do.

The British, however, would not and could not be outbuilt in ships by the Germans. The British, after all, did not have to maintain a large standing army as did the Germans, and thus they could devote their defense spending largely to the navy. As Lord Esher, government official and military reformer, said in 1912: "Whatever the cost may be, it is cheaper than a conscript army and an entangling alliance." The British steadily improved and increased the British fleet, adopting the dominant design of the day—the all-big-gun *Dreadnought* class of battleship—in 1906 and building twenty of them (against Germany's thirteen) by 1914.

At the same time that naval rivalry worsened relations between Britain and Germany, so also did German international behavior. After the British and French made their *entente cordiale* in 1904, the Germans hoped to break it down by diplomatic pressure. In 1905, Kaiser Wilhelm visited Morocco and demanded that the entente's Moroccan provisions be abandoned. But instead of crumbling British support for France, the Moroccan crisis strengthened it. At an international conference at Algeciras in 1906, the British stood by the French, and at the same time the two governments began to hold secret military staff talks that would eventually transform the nature of the entente. A second Moroccan crisis in 1911, caused by Germany's dispatch of a gunboat to Agadir in Morocco, had the same effect of driving Britain and France closer together.



British naval power at its peak: The Channel Squadron, by E. de Martineau (1912).

The secret Anglo-French staff talks continued from 1905 to 1914. They were officially authorized by Sir Edward Grey (1862–1933), foreign secretary from 1905 to 1914. A Liberal Imperialist but not an ideologue, Grey appeared to be a simple aristocratic fisherman and birdwatcher, but underneath his Northumberland country gentleman's appearance, he was a clever and secretive diplomatist who grew ever more suspicious of Germany. He regarded the German naval buildup as proof of Germany's anti-British intent: "If the German Navy ever became superior to ours, the German Army can conquer this country. There is no corresponding risk of this kind to Germany: for however superior our fleet was, no naval victory would bring us nearer to Berlin."

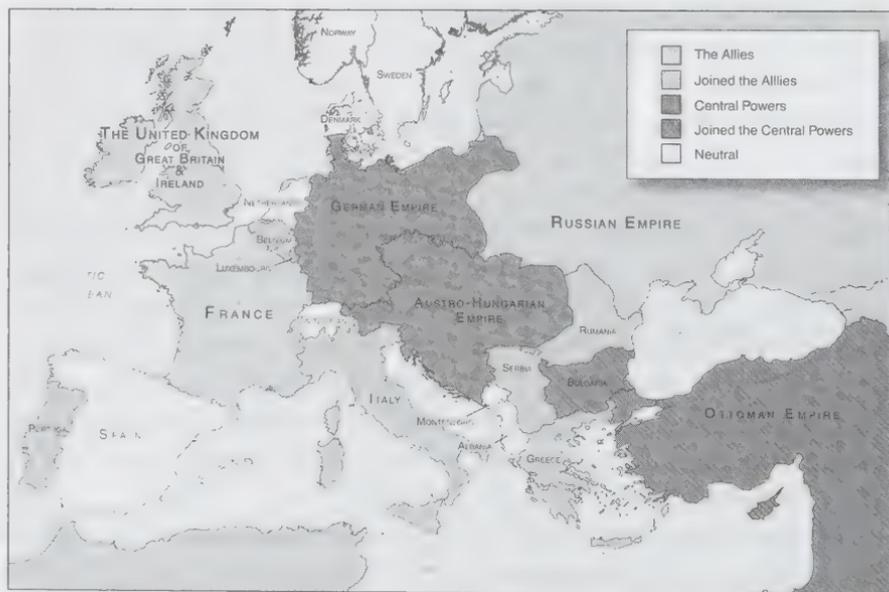
Grey did not tell the cabinet of the secret staff talks until 1911 (although both of the prime ministers he served under knew of them), and even then he insisted that the discussions did *not* amount to a formal alliance with France. He did, however, believe that the entente cordiale and the staff talks represented a moral commitment. Grey came to think that the defense of France was the defense of Britain because a Europe subservient to Germany would be intolerable. Yet he also believed—no doubt fooling himself on this point—that, because Britain had not signed a formal military and political alliance with France (or with Russia), it still retained freedom of action and could play the role of an honest broker. As events would finally teach Grey, he could not have it both ways.

The danger of dividing Europe into a pair of antagonistic alliances was that these systems were intricate mechanisms: once one part was set in motion, the other cogs and wheels would have to grind as well. Further, the increase in armaments in all the states had created an atmosphere of fear and suspicion, not least in Britain and Germany. The alliance system and the armaments race together made all of the powers to varying degrees

dependent on the advice of military and naval officers and on their tactical plans and timetables. The very internal dynamics of this system moved irresistibly toward war.

War between Austria-Hungary and Russia over some Balkan issue might have flared up on a number of occasions. In October 1912, for instance, four Balkan states long at odds with the Ottoman Empire—Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro—formed an alliance, went to war with the Turks, and prepared to split up the winnings. Austria-Hungary and Russia felt they had to intervene, and the other great powers were barely able to enforce a settlement, which soon fell apart in a second Balkan war in 1913. That neither of these two wars resulted in a general conflict between the two alliances was due largely to the restraint exercised by Germany on Austria and by Britain on Russia. Unfortunately, such restraint was seen within each alliance as weakening that alliance and therefore as something that must not be tried again.

When, therefore, a Serbian nationalist assassinated the Austrian heir apparent, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, in Sarajevo (Bosnia) on June 28, 1914, the necessary restraint was missing. Three weeks later, in a move cal-

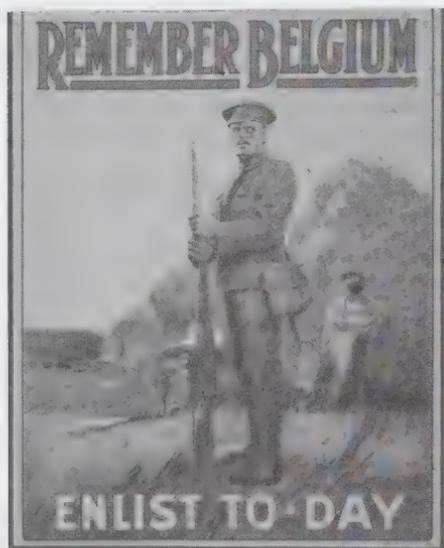


Europe on the Eve of World War I. Concerned about Germany's growing economic and naval might, the British abandoned their long tradition of "splendid isolation" from Continental affairs and entered into a series of agreements with the Russians and French in the years before World War I.

culated to end the Serbian problem once and for all, Austria issued to Serbia an ultimatum that would have limited Serbian independence. Already, the German government had resolved to back the Austrians. When the Russians began to mobilize their forces, various national war plans were set in motion. Germany declared war on Russia on August 1. Because the German war plan—originally designed by Count Alfred von Schlieffen in 1905—specified that Germany must attack France through Belgium before turning on the much slower, more cumbersome Russian army, the Germans invaded Belgium on August 3.

The Austrian ultimatum to Serbia thus caused a Balkan war, and the alliance system turned it into a Continental war. What was Britain to do? The rapid march of events after June 28 caught the British politicians and public alike by surprise, for their attention was riveted on the converging crises of domestic politics: labor unrest, Irish Home Rule, and Ulster resistance. Once the cabinet began to focus on unfolding events in Europe, it was deeply divided as to whether Britain should intervene in the war. But when Germany invaded Belgium, almost the entirety of the cabinet united quickly in favor of intervention. The same feeling of sympathy for “little Belgium” also persuaded Parliament and public opinion that Britain must fight. Thus, Britain entered the war with a high degree of unity: on August 4, crowds in Whitehall and Downing Street sang “God Save the King” as the time expired for a German reply to the British ultimatum. In subsequent days most politicians and newspapers pledged enthusiastic support of the war effort. Indeed, the outbreak of war to many Britons seemed a relief from the mounting strain of domestic conflict.

The German invasion of Belgium, therefore, was decisive for British opinion—but Grey and Prime Minister H. H. Asquith did not need the Belgian issue to persuade themselves that Britain must intervene. They had come to believe that a German victory on the Continent would be disastrous to British interests. As Grey told the cabinet, not only honor, but also “substantial obligations of policy” required it to back the French. Thus, it was not the German invasion of Belgium that in his view ultimately required Britain’s entry into the war, but Grey used that invasion effectively for his own purpose at the moment of crisis. If Asquith and Grey had known how terrible the war would be, and how destructive to British strength, they might have kept Britain out. But no European statesman anticipated how long and costly the war would be; none realized that it would change the world permanently or that it would substantially alter Britain’s place in that world.



Remember Belgium—Enlist to-day (Parliamentary Recruiting Committee poster, 1915). The German invasion of Belgium provided a popular rationale for British entry into World War I.

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Part **V**

**An Age of
Total War**

1914–1945

Chapter 23

The Great War, 1914–1918

Mass participation in world wars and the consequent losses in human and material resources were overarching themes in the history of Great Britain between 1914 and 1945. Two total wars, 1914–18 and 1939–45, stood as bookends around two decades of depression, and the depression itself was caused in large part by the damage done to the world economy by the first of these world wars. Seen in this light, the whole period of thirty-odd years after 1914 appears depressing and dispiriting. Yet in Britain this age of total war had paradoxical results: although the wars caused catastrophic losses in blood and treasure and accelerated the decline of British economic and political power in the world, they also contributed to the rapid advance of democracy and social welfare. The wars also called forth some of Britain's most gallant efforts. If this period encompassed Britain's lowest moments, it also included some of its finest hours.

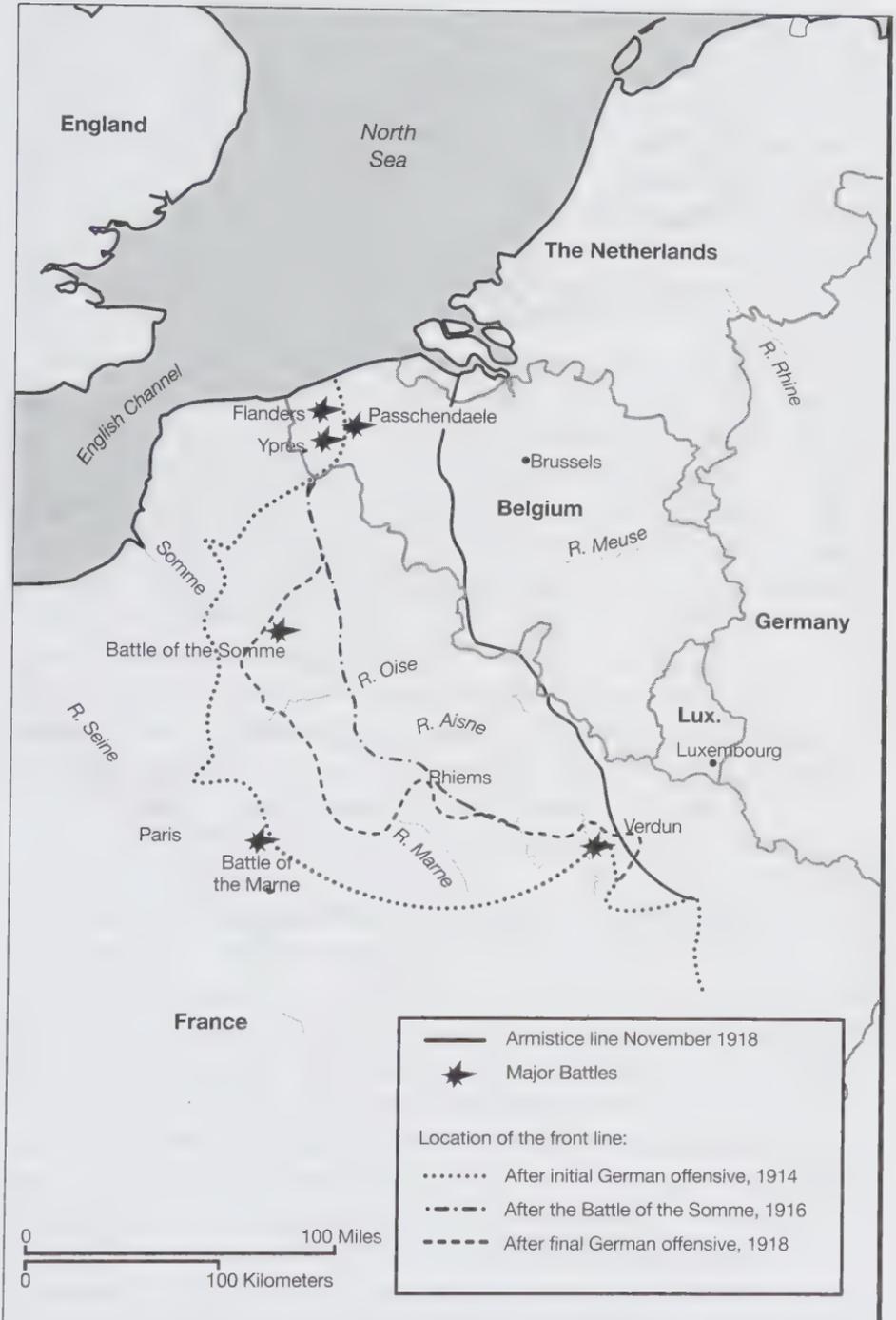
The two world wars may well be seen by future historians as phases of the same conflict, a struggle by Britain and the Allies against Germany's bid for mastery over Europe. But from our relatively close vantage point, the First World War was a distinct, and distinctly terrible, historical event. Contemporaries called it "the Great War" because many Britons believed that it was a war to end all wars and because everyone recognized it as an occurrence of cataclysmic proportions. As the first industrialized conflict, the Great War involved larger armies, more resources, more devastating machines, and more civilian effort than any war in European history. Though the British suffered less than the other great powers of Europe, they nevertheless became totally mobilized, sent abroad a huge army, and sustained losses unprecedented in British history. In a sense, in both material and psychological terms, they never completely recovered from it. As one Conservative politician wrote in 1921: "There are certain great historic events, like the Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution, that have altered mankind for good. The war was one of those far-reaching forces."

Sir Edward Grey observed on the evening of August 4, 1914, as time expired on Britain's ultimatum to Germany, "The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our time." Given the tragedy of the next four years, this was a very prescient remark. Yet historians are not by any means agreed on the overall impact of the Great War on British history. Some say it was a "great discontinuity" that changed everything: it damaged Britain's economy beyond repair, destroyed Victorian confidence and undermined conventional religious faith, killed the Liberal party while promoting Labour to take its place, advanced the cause of women, and introduced major elements of the welfare state. Other historians contend that the war only accelerated trends already in place and that such changes as occurred would have happened anyway. But to choose either of these interpretations at the expense of the other ignores two crucial points: (1) the war operated differentially on different trends—it accelerated some but delayed others; and (2) the urgent pressures of the war took long-term choices out of the hands of the policy makers who had to make decisions to further the immediate war effort, regardless of the long run. The Great War brought about an abrupt end to many Victorian institutions and practices, and the abruptness itself was a major feature of human experience.

THE COURSE OF WAR, 1914–1916

In August 1914, very few people in Britain expected a long war. Most expected the highly professional British Expeditionary Force (BEF), the result of Haldane's army reforms, to defeat the German thrust through Belgium. The BEF would take its place on the north (that is, left) end of the French defensive line and roll back the German army's advance in northern France and Flanders. As the BEF stopped the German right flank, the French would attack the German center in Lorraine. Together, the British and French would push the Germans out of France in a few months' time; meanwhile, the British navy would enforce a close blockade on German ports and defeat Tirpitz's High Seas Fleet in one great battle. The Germans would soon be forced to ask for peace.

Unfortunately, the British plan went wrong from the beginning. The French offensive failed. The German onslaught crumpled the six divisions of the BEF (nearly ninety thousand men commanded by Sir John French) in northern France and Flanders. The British fought well at Mons (just across the border in Belgium), but were forced to retreat rapidly southward as the German offensive swung like a huge gate south and west toward Paris. The



The Western Front during World War I. The poet Siegfried Sassoon, who served on the Western Front, described the war as “a matter of holes and ditches.” The battle lines changed little between late 1914 and the beginning of 1918, as the Allies and Germans settled into a war of attrition.

combined British and French armies barely managed to push the Germans back to a point about fifty miles from Paris. With the German offensive stalled, the British and German armies tried to outflank each other by successive rapid moves to the north. These attempts failed, as the two armies soon reached the Channel coast. In October, the British tried to break through the German lines in Flanders, at the Belgian town of Ypres, but their attack ran headlong into a German offensive and failed. Thereafter, the war on the Western Front settled into a stalemate, and both sides began to entrench.

By November 1914, the lines of trenches stretched three hundred miles northward from the Swiss border through Flanders to the Channel. Between October 1914 and spring 1917, the front did not move more than ten miles in either direction, even though each side hurled itself in massive, bloody assaults on the other. The weapons of defense—machine guns, barbed wire, and heavy artillery—held a great advantage over the offense. Deeply dug in and deployed in several parallel trench lines from front line to rear areas, defensive forces could be made miserable but not crushed. Generals on both sides, however, cherished the dream of breaking through the enemy's defenses and so recovering a "war of movement." Thus, the war in France became a series of alternating massive attacks and desperate defenses, as commanding generals sought to amass enough men and material for the one knockout blow.

The British lost eighty-nine thousand men on the Western Front in 1914, which effectively destroyed their professional army. In late 1914 and early 1915, the British had to recruit a new army of some two million men. Cherishing its Liberal principles, the Asquith government relied entirely on volunteers. Conscription, the Liberals thought, would overstep the limits of government control over the individual. The secretary for war appointed at the outbreak of the fighting, Lord Kitchener, was already a national hero. He made a personal appeal for volunteers and became the symbol of Britain's war effort when his imposing face appeared on a recruiting poster declaring "Your country needs YOU." Inspired by innocent patriotism, recruits came forward by the thousands, even though Kitchener did not at first have the means to train or equip them. The army had agreed that those who joined together would stay together in their units; hence, the volunteers were organized into Pals' Battalions and kept their local and regional identity even when sent to the Western Front. Only partially trained, Kitchener's new army was dispatched to France in 1916. By the spring of 1916, the BEF



The famous recruiting poster of 1914, featuring Lord Kitchener: "Your Country Needs You."

stood at 1.5 million men, the largest government enterprise of any kind to that point in British history. At the same time, the British Empire also began to send forces—Indians, Canadians, Australians, and New Zealanders.

Until the new British army could be mobilized and trained, the French had to bear the brunt of the fighting against Germany. The BEF carried out two offensives in 1915, both failures. These futile assaults revealed severe shortages of artillery guns and shells. So serious was this "shell scandal" that it forced a cabinet shake-up and the elevation of Lloyd George to the post of minister of munitions. Eventually, by his prodigious energy and unorthodox methods, Lloyd George corrected the munitions problem, although British troops suffered for more than a year from defective shells.

Kitchener and the government realized that the Allies for the time being would not be able to win a breakthrough in France. The alternative was to attack on some other front, preferably in an area where the German army was not so strong and where the British could take advantage of sea power. The area chosen—and enthusiastically promoted by the first lord of the admiralty, Winston Churchill—was the Gallipoli Peninsula on the Dardanelles Straits near Constantinople. If the British could seize the straits and take Constantinople, they could knock the Ottoman Empire (a German ally) out of the war and bring aid to beleaguered Serbia and Russia. The

government was soon embroiled in a bitter controversy over diverting troops from the Western Front to Gallipoli; hence, they initially tried to force the straits by ships alone. The purely naval attack in the straits failed, however, as the British lost three battleships to Turkish mines. The government realized that only an amphibious assault on Gallipoli could succeed. Alas, the British invasion of Gallipoli (April 1915) was hastily planned and poorly supported. Despite backbreaking efforts by nearly half a million British, French, and Australian-New Zealand (ANZAC) troops, the Turks held firm, and the invasion ground to a halt in trench warfare. Finally, in December 1915, the Allied forces were withdrawn, the army having sustained more than two hundred thousand casualties.

In December 1915, Sir Douglas Haig replaced General French as commander of the BEF in France. Haig was a Lowland Scottish Presbyterian, with all the stolid, serious stubbornness of his breed. No one ever looked the part of a commanding general more than Haig, who was fit, erect, and handsome. He was also courageous and determined, but sadly unimaginative. Haig knew that his army would not be fully trained for an offensive until late summer of 1916. The French, however, needed immediate relief from German pressure because they were being drained dry by the Germans at Verdun. General Joffre, the French commander-in-chief, appealed to Haig for an early attack. Haig thus agreed to a massive assault in northern France, on the River Somme, even though his army was not yet up to the level of the German veterans they faced.

The Battle of the Somme (July 1–November 18, 1916) was one of the most terrible of the war and justifiably earned a place in British literary and popular culture alike for its horrors. Fourteen British and five French divisions attacked well-entrenched Germans along an eighteen-mile front. The assault was preceded by a week of artillery shelling, but the artillery failed both to cut the Germans' barbed wire and to crush their trenches. The British troops thus were caught in the open by murderous machine gun fire and artillery barrages. By the end of the first day, the British had suffered sixty thousand casualties, including twenty thousand dead. Attack followed counterattack for 140 days. By the time Haig shut down the offensive, the British and imperial forces had sustained 415,000 casualties—all for the advance of a few miles.

The year 1916 was equally frustrating for the navy. German submarines had made a close blockade of German ports untenable, but a more distant blockade sufficed. The Royal Navy swept the seas of the few German surface warships, cut off German shipping, and at the same time bottled up the

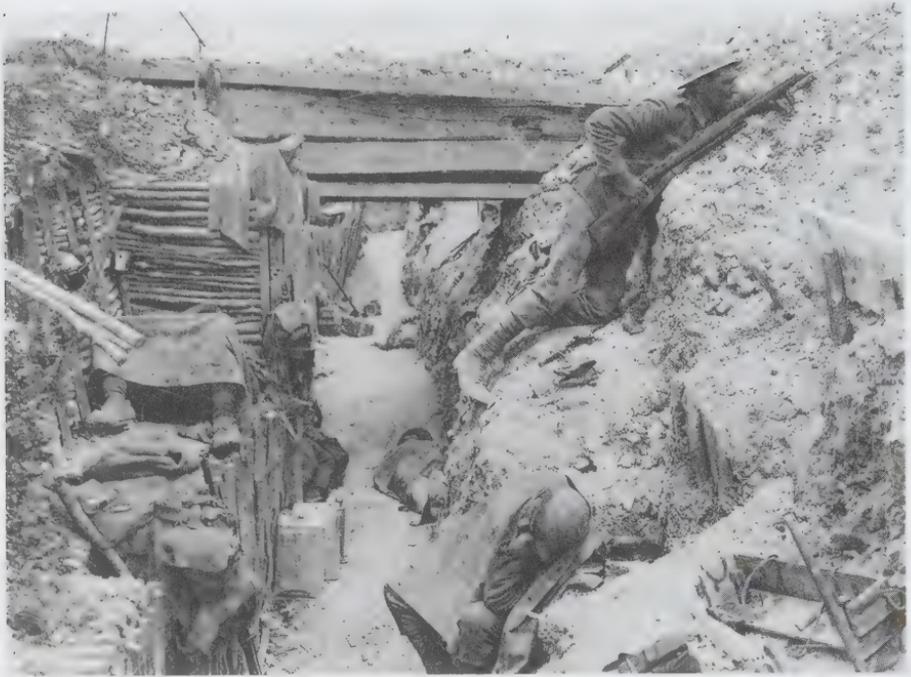
German fleet. The British Grand Fleet still outnumbered the German High Seas Fleet by a substantial margin, but both sides desired a full-scale showdown. At last, at the end of May 1916, the German fleet emerged from port in an attempt to lure the British into a trap. The two fleets met in the North Sea off Jutland, and in a battle characterized by caution and confusion on both sides, dealt each other severe punishment. The Germans sank six British cruisers while losing one battleship and one cruiser and suffering major damage to a number of other large ships. The British evaded the trap and the Germans returned to port; they did not emerge again in force during the war.

The British commander at Jutland, Admiral Jellicoe, received much criticism for not pressing home the attack in the Nelson tradition. But as has often been observed, Jellicoe was the one man who could have lost the war in one afternoon. The strategic situation dictated safety first to Jellicoe, for as long as his Grand Fleet existed, the German fleet had to lie low; as long as the German fleet lay low, the British could supply their troops in France and import materiel across the Atlantic. An American journalist rightly noted about the Battle of Jutland, “The German Fleet has assaulted its jailer; but it is still in jail.”

THE COMBAT EXPERIENCE

Combat under any conditions is a terrible experience, but warfare on the Western Front during the Great War was peculiarly horrifying. The experience of trench warfare was seared into the British psyche and became an underlying nightmare in the modern imagination. The futility of even the bravest attacks, the impotence of individual efforts against the machines of war, the wasted landscape, and the seeming inevitability of death dominated the combat experience of millions of British soldiers.

The Allies and Germans faced each other from their trenches, sometimes a mile or so apart, sometimes no more than fifty yards. In between the opposing trenches, no-man’s-land was contested area, and even at quiet times the Allies and Germans crept out into no-man’s-land to reconnoiter the enemy’s position, listen to unseen activities, carry out raids, and take prisoners. In the summer of 1915, the British lost three hundred men a day even when they were not being attacked or attacking; staff officers called these losses wastage. Trenches were dug in roughly parallel rows of three: the front or firing trench, backed up by support trenches and connected by communications trenches. The front trench normally was six to eight feet



Trench warfare: a *British trench at the Somme, 1916.*

deep, with a firing step of a foot or two from which riflemen could fight. If one looked over the parapet of sandbags at the lip of the trench during daylight, he was sure to be cut down by a sniper. Thus, life went on in what Professor Paul Fussell called a “troglodyte world”—men digging, burrowing, always moving out of sight in daytime and crawling out to patrol and fight only at night. The British trenches, unlike the German, tended to be wet, cold, and filthy, overrun with rats and often revealing the skeletons and rotting limbs of half-buried dead.

Both strategy and tactics on the Western Front were simple. Because the Germans occupied French territory, they had to be driven out; hence, the British and French had to take the initiative. But industrial technology had given all the advantages to the defense. The machine gun was the new queen of battle, for it could, from entrenched strong points, and with a minimum of tending by its operators, send an unbroken stream of bullets down the length of no-man’s-land. In addition, the defense’s heavy artillery could lay down precise barrages of high explosives and steel on the attacking troops. The only hope for attacking forces to have any chance against the enemy’s trenches was for their own artillery to throw such a tremendous weight of shells on them that the machine guns would be destroyed and the

defenders either killed or paralyzed by shock. Ideally, the attackers' artillery fire, by means of a rolling barrage, could move steadily forward in front of them. In 1915 poison gas added its peculiar terror to the offensive technology. Attacking troops, therefore, could in theory go over the top of their own trench, quickly cross no-man's-land, and seize the enemy's trench by hand-to-hand fighting.

Attacking troops, however, normally found that the preliminary artillery bombardment did not work. Each side learned to dig bomb shelters at key points in their trenches. These dug-out rooms, sunk twenty feet or more into the ground and reinforced by timbers and concrete, gave protection from the bombardments to troops and machine guns. Battles thus became races once the opening artillery fire lifted: the attacking troops tried to cross no-man's-land—invariably a lunar landscape of shell craters, churned-up terrain, and barbed wire—before the machine gun crews dug their way out of shattered bomb shelters and ran up the steps to their gun emplacements. If the machine gun crews managed to set up their guns while the attackers were still in no-man's-land—if they won the crucial *race to the parapets*—they could cut attackers down like hay before a scythe.

The eventual solution for trench warfare would be the tank, a kind of self-propelled, armored, trench-crushing artillery piece. Unfortunately for the British, the engineers and armaments manufacturers were not able to develop and produce tanks quickly enough to have a decisive effect in the Great War until the spring of 1918. Tanks were first committed to battle in September 1916, but they broke down easily and the army did not yet have enough of them for effective deployment.

The two greatest offensives in which the British were involved before 1918 illustrate these points: the Somme (1916) and Passchendaele (1917). The Battle of the Somme took place in what had been the rolling farmland of northern France. On most of the battlefield, the opposing trenches were only five hundred yards apart, and the British High Command believed that a preliminary barrage of seven days, in which 1.5 million shells would blast the German trenches, would enable British troops to cross no-man's-land and occupy the German position. These troops were mostly volunteers of the Pals' Battalions and not well enough trained to do anything but walk across no-man's-land. Company officers, many of them former public school boys, thought it was the duty of their working-class troops to do the killing, while they themselves walked in advance—and unarmed. As we have seen, the British artillery bombardment failed to cut the German wire or destroy their trenches. The German machine gunners won the race to their parapets

and proceeded to mow down Kitchener's volunteers in waves. One British officer, later surveying the field, found "line after line of dead men lying where they had fallen." Most of the twenty thousand killed on that first day died in the first hour.

Haig remained confident that he could find a way to break through the German line even after the Soenne disaster. He rightly thought that the tank would provide the answer, but he overestimated the number that British factories could produce. In the summer of 1917, Haig planned to use massed tanks to smash the German defense near Ypres in Belgium. To give the tanks a level field in which to maneuver, he would omit the usual preliminary bombardment. But production problems limited the number of tanks actually delivered; therefore, Haig decided to open with a bombardment after all. The shelling and an exceptionally heavy rain turned the battlefield into a treacherous bog. Into this nightmarish quagmire the British attacked in August 1917. The offensive was a total failure. The British suffered 250,000 casualties in four months, and the hideous mud took its own share of the victims. The British poet Siegfried Sassoon, who participated in the battle, wrote:

. . . I died in hell
 (They called it Passchendaele) my wound was slight
 And I was hobbling back; and then a shell
 Burst slick upon the duckboards; so I fell
 Into the bottomless mud, and lost the light.

Said one staff officer on seeing the battlefield for the first time: "Good God, did we really send men to fight in that?"

The experience of trench warfare left permanent scars on the psyche of many a British "Tommy." It cruelly ended the high expectations and idealism with which so many marched off to war in 1914 and 1915 and replaced them with bitterness and a sense of irony. The young Cambridge poet Rupert Brooke expressed the early British enthusiasm for the war in "Peace" (1914):

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
 And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
 With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
 To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping.

But Brooke died of blood poisoning in 1915 on his way to Gallipoli.

Soldiers discovered that the conventional reasons given for war were frauds—high patriotic ideals, religion, the flag—and that what kept them going was leadership, discipline, and loyalty to their comrades. The combatants felt separated by their experience from all other people, whether civilians or staff officers. Sassoon wrote,

“Good-morning; good-morning”! The General said
 When we met him last week on our way to the line.
 Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of ‘em dead,
 And we’re cursing his staff for incompetent swine.

THE HOME FRONT

Idealism and enthusiasm for the war lasted longer at home than at the front. To be sure, there was from the beginning a significant antiwar movement in Britain. It never numbered more than a minority of intellectuals and political activists, but it included both Liberals and socialists who thought that Britain had no good reason to go to war or that the war had been caused by the international system itself, with its secret treaties, its bloated armaments, and the obsolete aristocrats who pulled its strings. *wire-pullers*. Suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst was a pacifist. Most of the Bloomsbury Group opposed the war, and philosopher Bertrand Russell lost his post at Cambridge and served a term in jail for his opposition. Ramsay MacDonald, chairman of the parliamentary Labour party, was forced by his party to resign his office because he opposed the war. A number of Liberals and socialists founded the Union of Democratic Control (UDC) to lobby for a negotiated end to the war and for open, democratic foreign affairs. Others founded the No-Conscription Fellowship to resist the introduction of a military draft. They became *conscientious objectors* to combat service; eventually over fifteen thousand men took this position, and over a third of them were imprisoned. On the whole, however, the vast majority of Britons supported the war effort.

Over time, however, even ordinary patriotic civilians became frustrated by the lack of success on the Continent and at sea, and many finally gave in to dull despair because of the relentless flow of daily casualty lists. British civilians did experience occasional attacks from German warships and Zeppelins, but all told suffered only 5,600 casualties from German action. But the British armed forces incurred an average of 1,500 casualties *a day* for 4.5 years, and hardly a family was left unscathed. Added to the restrictions, shortages, and rationing brought on by the war, the casualty lists of husbands, fathers, sons, and lovers created an atmosphere of bleakness and exhaustion.

Public policy evolved from “business as usual” to massive state intervention in economy and society. To pay for the war, the base income tax was doubled in the first few months and then raised by another 40 percent within a year; the surtax also went up rapidly. Overall, the income tax went

up by 500 percent during the war, and annual government expenditures increased by almost 700 percent. The government took the country off the gold standard right away and eventually adopted protective tariffs and took over the railways and shipping. The munitions crisis of 1915 led to government possession of the munitions factories and by 1918 to government ownership or control over coal mines; fuel oil refineries; and factories that produced airplanes, agricultural machinery, and industrial chemicals. All of this was done with the cooperation of big businessmen who accepted state intervention in return for a government guarantee of profits. In the spring of 1918, the government adopted a national rationing scheme. By then, the government was buying and distributing over 90 percent of British imports.

The main mechanisms of government control were the three Defense of the Realm Acts (DORA) passed in 1914 and 1915. These extraordinary measures gave the government broad control over society, including the power to stop virtually any activity it pleased. Civil liberties as well as industry were thus subjected to government control. Eventually, the government used DORA not only to direct the allocation of resources for industrial production, but also to control the labor supply, restrict the consumption of certain goods, suspend holidays, and defend against leaks of national secrets. Yet, although some Liberals objected to DORA on grounds that the acts were illegitimate intrusions into individual lives, on the whole the government did not abuse its extraordinary powers.

Undoubtedly the greatest intrusion by the government into private lives was conscription. Voluntary enlistment began to fall off in the middle of 1915, but the government knew that another two million men were available. Conservatives and other politicians anxious to press the war effort without restraint urged the introduction of conscription. Asquith resisted but finally had to give in. Parliament passed a measure providing for the draft of bachelors in January 1916. That act proved unable to supply enough bodies for the war's insatiable appetite; hence, in May 1916 an act made all men between the ages of eighteen and forty-one subject to conscription. (Later the upper limit was raised to age fifty-one.) By the end of the war, six million of the ten million in that age group served in the armed forces—the highest rate of wartime participation in British history to that time. Only in Ireland was conscription not implemented.

The number of people mobilized for the war effort was even greater than the number drafted for combat. War production was almost as important as the fighting itself, which meant that the labor force had to be aug-

mented and deployed effectively. Because many workers went into uniform at the same time as production was being stimulated, the demand for labor grew rapidly. Unemployment and underemployment, two of the chronic failings of the old economy, quickly disappeared. Workers held a strong position and consequently enjoyed higher wages. Trade union officials reached an agreement with the government early in 1915 whereby the unions gave up for the duration of the war the right to strike and agreed to *dilution* (admission of unskilled or female workers into jobs formerly held by skilled male workers). An unofficial shop steward movement, however, grew up in many areas—most notably on Clydeside in Scotland and in the coalfields of South Wales—to speak for ordinary workers' interests. Strikes did occasionally break out, and in general the government gave in.

Overall, then, labor benefited from the war effort. According to one estimate, employed British workers enjoyed by the 1920s a 25-percent increase in their standard of living. Moreover, the trade union movement won recognition and status by its cooperation with the government. Total union membership grew from 4 million in 1914 to 6.5 million in 1918. The expansion of union membership in turn greatly benefited the Labour party. Most of the members of the party supported the war effort, and Labour leaders took government office for the first time. The party took advantage of its more favorable position to draft a new constitution early in 1918. This extended party membership beyond the unions and socialist societies to establish constituency organizations; it thereby created an effective national electoral machinery.

The place of women in British society also changed during the war as women moved into new, more public roles. Thousands of women volunteered for service roles in the military—in the WAACS (Women's Army Auxiliary Corps), the WRNS (Women's Royal Naval Service or "Wrens"), and the WRAF (Women's Royal Air Force). In addition, some 800,000 went to work in munitions industries and almost 1.5 million in clerical posts in both commercial and government offices. Office girls, as they were called, became a permanent feature of the social landscape. Many of these working women migrated from one region to another to work: young women from Welsh mining communities to the munitions factories of the English Midlands, and village women to the offices of London and other urban centers. At the same time, thousands of women left domestic service, an occupation that had for many generations contributed to the subservience of women, to take industrial and commercial jobs offering better pay and more personal

freedom. Many women thus enjoyed some liberation from old restrictions on their economic and social roles and behavior. As they went to work in large numbers, women abandoned corsets and floor-length skirts—and many also tossed aside prewar propriety as the constant possibility of death for men going off to the front encouraged young people to establish intimate relationships much more quickly.

WARTIME POLITICS

The Great War put severe strain on the British political system. Speed of decision making and unity of effort were essential. Parliament could not develop and oversee policies under these conditions; hence, power shifted to the cabinet and eventually to smaller councils within the cabinet. The office of prime minister became more important than ever. The public had little part to play in shaping policy. Even the general election that should have been held in 1915 was postponed “for the duration.” As time passed, the political parties put aside their normal adversarial role in favor of cooperation. Two different war coalitions were formed. In all these ways the British political system proved highly flexible. Even so, the pressures of war split the Liberal party, which, as we will see in subsequent chapters, never recovered from its wounds.

Prime Minister Asquith was confident that he and his cabinet would be equal to the challenge of war, not least because they believed they had done everything possible to avoid it. Asquith did establish in 1915 a war council, but he did not assign it executive responsibility. In general, he attempted to conduct the war through the cabinet, in which the most powerful figures were Kitchener, the secretary for war, who became the very image of the war effort; Winston Churchill, first lord of the admiralty, who had great initiative and imagination; and David Lloyd George, who increasingly impressed insiders with his energy and decisiveness. Asquith deferred in military and naval matters to the experts, especially Kitchener and Churchill, reserving for himself the role of chairman of the government.

Asquith had accomplished a great deal since becoming prime minister in 1908, for he had guided the Liberal government through exceptionally rough political waters. He was in some ways an extremely able man, with an impressive intellect and powerful debating skills. Under his leadership, the Liberal government brought a unified Britain into the war, it successfully deployed the BEF and the Royal Navy, and it began the mobilization of the

economy and the society for the war. But Asquith was more a mediator than a leader, a highly competent parliamentarian but one lacking in creative vision. He had little rapport with the public and presented an image of Olympian detachment. People who knew him thought he spent too much time socializing and playing bridge. It has to be admitted that he failed to act with enough speed and decisiveness and that he neglected to build an image to which either the public or the elite could rally.

The conviction that Asquith was not forceful enough to lead a nation at war grew in parliamentary circles from the winter of 1914 on. Nationalistic Conservatives were especially eager for a more active government. The shell scandal of May 1915 revealed serious shortcomings in war production, and the Gallipoli disaster provoked the Conservatives to look for a scapegoat. The first sea lord, Sir John Fisher, a favorite of the Conservatives, resigned after a volcanic dispute with Churchill over the Dardanelles. Asquith met these problems by constructing a coalition government: he removed Churchill from the admiralty, brought several Conservatives and the leader of the parliamentary Labour party (Arthur Henderson) into the cabinet, and made Lloyd George head of a new ministry of munitions. This coalition lasted from May 1915 until December 1916.

Asquith's coalition brought him temporary political relief and set the production of munitions on the right track, but it otherwise failed to improve significantly the conduct of the war. By the spring of 1916, not only the Conservatives but also elements within the Liberal party were agitating for further change. Kitchener, who had little administrative ability, had become an embarrassment. Asquith reassigned most of Kitchener's duties to Sir William Robertson, chief of the imperial general staff, and he also appointed Haig commander of the BEF. Kitchener's death at sea in June 1916 then resolved the question of his role. But Asquith still deferred to his generals and failed to galvanize the cabinet into an effective executive. Worse yet, Asquith dragged his feet over the matter of conscription, and a rebellion in Ireland at Easter 1916 (see chapter 24) damaged his authority.

Lloyd George meanwhile attracted much favorable attention because of his success with the munitions industry. Some Conservatives thought that he was unsuited for high office because of both his humble social origins and his prewar record of Welsh radicalism and opposition to the South African War. Others, however, admired his driving force and his will to do the job at hand, whatever the methods required. Certain highly influential newspaper barons—including Sir Max Aitken (later Lord Beaverbrook),

publisher of the *Daily Express*; Lord Northcliffe, jingoistic owner of the *Daily Mail* and the *Times*; and Geoffrey Robinson, editor of the *Times*—pressed for reform of the executive and embraced the idea of Lloyd George as war leader. The “Welsh Wizard” himself, a highly ambitious as well as a mercurial politician and administrator, was eager for change.

Finally, in December 1916, Lloyd George presented Asquith with a plan whereby he would head a small, all-powerful war committee to run the war while Asquith stayed on as a figurehead prime minister. Asquith had a momentous decision to make, and perhaps the patriotic gesture would have been to accept the plan. But the weary and discouraged Asquith, already grieving over the loss of his son Raymond on the Western Front, could not accept the demotion. He resigned. With the Conservative leader, Bonar Law, unable to gather the support necessary to form a government, King George V sent for Lloyd George. The Welsh Wizard became prime minister of a second coalition government as well as chair of a five-person war cabinet (composed of himself, three Conservatives, and one Labourite, Arthur Henderson).

Lloyd George proved to be a leader of nearly superhuman energy and determination. He quickly assumed personal control over the war effort. Yet Lloyd George has never stood as high in the estimation of the British public as other great war leaders like the younger Pitt or Winston Churchill. Charming, uncannily sensitive to public opinion, and a superb manipulator of individuals and the press alike, Lloyd George focused intently on his goals, but was unscrupulous about his methods. He always seemed willing to sacrifice the means for the end. Successively a Welsh radical, a pro-Boer, an aristocrat-bashing New Liberal, and now a ferocious war minister, Lloyd George appeared overly ambitious and unprincipled. He was highly partisan—a political fighter—but not a loyal party member. As Lord Beaverbrook put it, “He did not seem to care which way he travelled, providing he was in the driver’s seat.”

Lloyd George’s worst qualities would in peacetime isolate him on the periphery of politics. But during the war his best qualities came to the fore. He radically increased the amount and pace of governmental activity. His war cabinet of five proved a very flexible and effective instrument. Its members met approximately five hundred times in the next two years, ranging freely over all major issues and calling in other government officials and cabinet members as the need arose. Lloyd George enhanced its impact by creating a permanent cabinet secretariat, which coordinated the work of the whole ministry. To obtain information and advice on special topics, he called

on a group of private advisors housed in the garden of No. 10 Downing Street—his so-called Garden Suburb. He brought businessmen into the government. He recalled Churchill from political exile to take over the ministry of munitions. He established and chaired the Imperial War Cabinet to coordinate the efforts of Britain and the dominions—and, when he saw fit, to circumvent his own war cabinet.

Lloyd George's supercession of Asquith, and Asquith's reaction to it, fatally divided the Liberal party. Asquith never forgave Lloyd George for leading what he regarded as an unprincipled conspiracy. Yet it was Asquith who had actually ended the Liberal government by forming a coalition in May 1915 and who now led about one hundred Liberal MPs into opposition. Asquith's Liberals came mainly from the left and center sections of the party, whereas Lloyd George's Liberals came from the right wing. Without the "Squiffies" (as supporters of Asquith were known, from one of his more derogatory nicknames) or "Wee Frees" (another nickname for Asquith loyalists), Lloyd George depended on Conservative support. The Liberal split hardened during the next two years as the Asquith Liberals regularly criticized Lloyd George and the prime minister increasingly looked to hard-driving businessmen to lead the war effort.

The Labour party meanwhile had been given a golden opportunity by the Liberal split to become the principal party of the left. Labour emerged at the end of the war in a vastly stronger position than it occupied in 1914 in England and, as we will see in the next chapter, in Wales and Scotland. Trade unions, which formed the basis of Labour's electoral power, expanded, not only in membership numbers, but also in political influence during the war. The new constitution of the Labour party further improved its electoral footing, while the expansion of the franchise in 1918 made the working class overwhelmingly the majority of the electorate. The wartime expansion of state power accustomed British voters to collectivist action of a sort long advocated by the Fabian element of the Labour movement. Most importantly, the entry of Arthur Henderson into the cabinet (and other Labourites into lower-level government posts) helped voters in all social classes realize that a Labour party in power might not be such a frightening possibility.

Although the Labour party participated in the war effort, it did not give up its independence. The party generally supported the war, but had reservations about pressing it to the point of total defeat of Germany. Labourites preferred an early peace to a knockout blow. Thus, in September 1917, Henderson resigned from the Lloyd George coalition because he thought it important to attend an international socialist conference in Stockholm,

which would also be attended by German socialists. The party supported Henderson's action and thereby affirmed its autonomy from Lloyd George's all-party government. Such autonomy placed Labour in a solid position for postwar politics.

WAR'S END, 1917–1918

By the time Lloyd George became prime minister at the end of 1916, the British realized that they were in for a long war that might well stretch into 1919 or 1920. The year between the spring of 1917 and the early summer of 1918 was the worst time of the war for the British, with staggering losses and stalemate on the Western Front, a crisis at sea, and the collapse of their Russian ally. But the tide finally turned, not least because a great new ally, the United States, entered the war, and in 1918 the Western Front unexpectedly turned into a rout. The war was thus to end as abruptly as it had begun.

Lloyd George insisted on civilian control over military strategy, but with only mixed results. He was able to impose his will on the admiralty on one crucial issue: in April 1917, he forced the navy to adopt the convoy system to protect Allied shipping from German submarines. This saved British food supplies. He was much less effective with the army. Lloyd George strongly favored an *eastern strategy*—attacking through Italy, the Balkans, or the Middle East. The top generals, Robertson and Haig, passionately believed in a *western strategy*—trying to defeat the German army in France and Flanders. This dispute between the “frock coats” and “brass hats” in 1917 went in favor of the latter. Only in 1918 did Lloyd George begin to win full control. Even so, he was never sure enough of his political position to dismiss Haig; thus, Haig controlled the war on land.

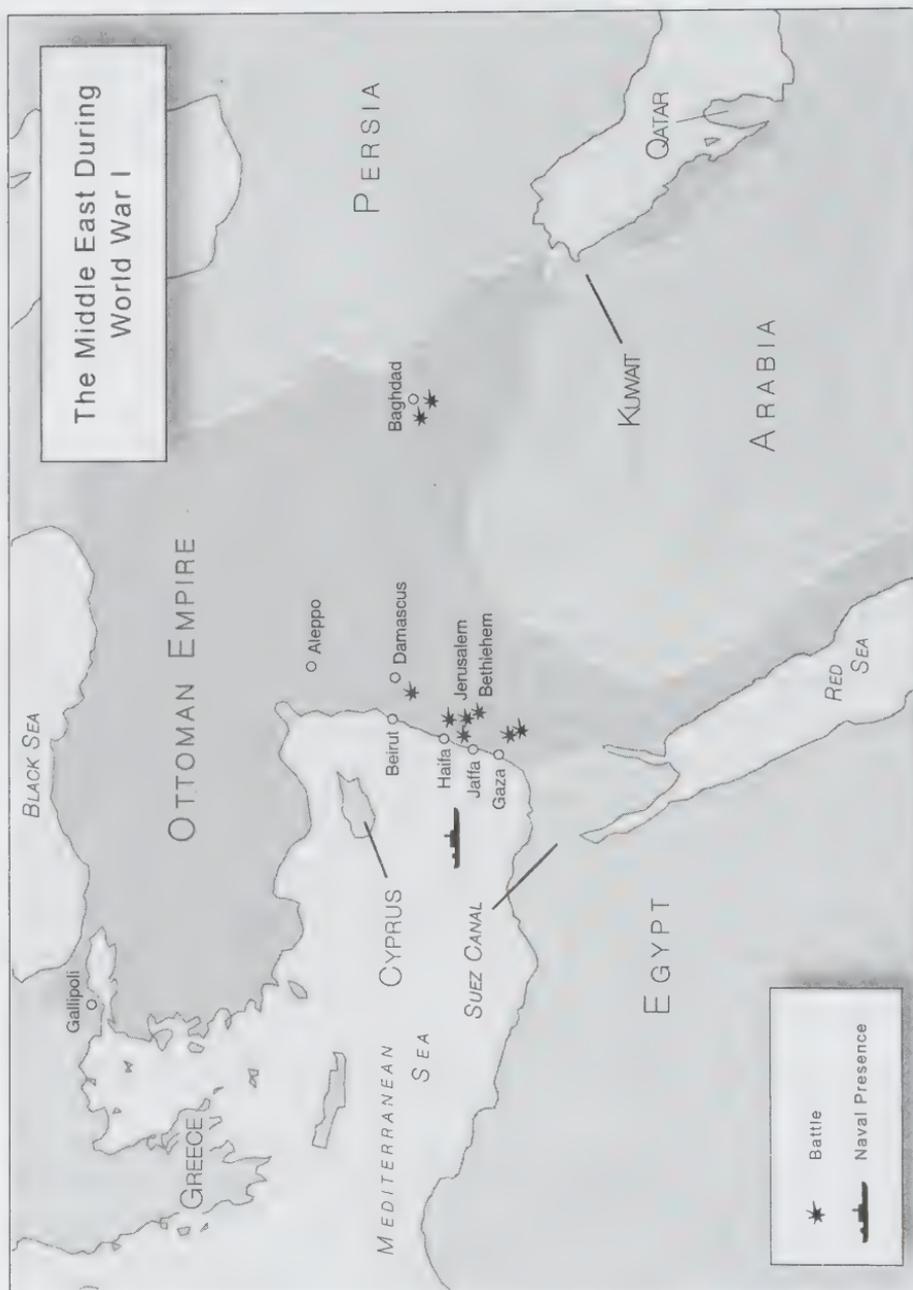
On the Western Front in 1917, the British launched new offenses but were thrown back. In the spring of that year, a new French commanding general, Nivelle, captured Lloyd George's imagination with promises of a lightning thrust and breakthrough. The British part in the offensive was to be another assault in northern France, near Arras. But Nivelle's offensive soon collapsed into the usual bloodletting and stalemate. Even so, Haig believed that he had learned how to achieve the ever-elusive breakthrough and now argued strenuously for a further British offensive in 1917. Another row between brass hats and frock coats ensued, and as usual the brass hats won. The terrible battle of Passchendaele (or the Third Battle of Ypres) was the result: four months of murderous slogging, yielding 250,000 British casualties but no breakdown of the German defenses.



Brass hats and frock coats.
From left to right: Albert Thomas, General Douglas Haig, General Joffre, and Prime Minister David Lloyd George.

The war went poorly for Britain even on battlefields other than the Western Front. British and imperial troops had defended the Suez Canal and Basra near the Persian Gulf from seizure by Ottoman armies since 1914. In 1916, the British army in Egypt took the Sinai Peninsula, and in 1917 it invaded Palestine (then a province of the Ottoman Empire). The British objective was Jerusalem, but the Turks threw them back. It was not until December of 1917 that the British army, now commanded in the Middle East by General Sir Edmund Allenby, conquered Jerusalem. Meanwhile, British forces at Basra attempted to force their way up the Tigris River into Mesopotamia to Baghdad. Throughout 1915 and 1916, the British and Indian troops made little progress. Only by strong reinforcements and strenuous trench warfare in the desert were the British able to take Baghdad, which finally fell in March 1917.

Even so, the Ottoman Empire remained in the war. In order to dislodge Turkish forces from the Middle East, the British made momentous contradictory promises to various parties. To the Arab Sheraif Husain, the British promised independence for all Arab territories within the Ottoman Empire. To the European Zionist movement, in the so-called Balfour Declaration of November 1917, the British promised a national home for Jews in Palestine. And all the while, the British were making deals with the French to divide these territories among themselves. This tangled web of commitments would one day have serious consequences for the British and for the peoples of the area.



The Middle East during World War I. To win the war in the Middle East, the British made contradictory promises to their French allies, Arab nationalists, and Jewish settler groups. The results would haunt the region into the twenty-first century.

On the oceans, 1917 brought a major German submarine offensive. The Germans had discovered that the submarine was a near-perfect commerce raider: it could slip undetected out of safe ports to prey on merchant ships with little danger to itself. Neutral nations such as the United States regarded U-boat warfare as unusually cruel, but the Germans through 1916 had tried to avoid sinking the ships of neutral powers. Early in 1917, however, with their hard-pressed nation in need of a quick victory, German leaders proclaimed unrestricted submarine warfare. American as well as British shipping to Britain would be cut off, and British industry would have to close down. The Germans knew that this submarine offensive was a big gamble, for it would provoke the United States into declaring war on Germany. The bet was that Britain might be defeated before the Americans mobilized their prodigious resources.

The gamble very nearly paid off. In the first month of unrestricted submarine warfare, the Germans sank more than five hundred thousand tons of merchant shipping. The figure rose to almost nine hundred thousand tons in May 1917. Admiral Jellicoe warned Lloyd George that “it is impossible for us to go on with the war if losses like this continue.” But the British adopted the convoy system, whereby merchant ships crossed the Atlantic in groups protected by destroyers, like herds of sheep defended from wolves by shepherds. By September 1917, shipping losses to U-boats had fallen to a tolerable level, and the crisis passed.

The submarine offensive, moreover, had prodded the United States into entering the war on the side of the Allies. The United States declared war in April 1917 and began the massive job of preparing an expeditionary army. The American entry, however, was balanced by the Russian departure from the war. By early 1917, food riots and demonstrations against the tsar’s autocratic and inept government wracked the Russian Empire, which had suffered huge losses of manpower on the Eastern Front. In March 1917, Russia slid into revolution. The tsar abdicated and was replaced by a provisional social democratic government that tried to continue the war effort. But a huge German offensive in September 1917 shattered the tottering Russian army, and in November the Bolsheviks (Communists) led by Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky overthrew the provisional government. In December the new Bolshevik government made peace with Germany. By the Treaty of Brest Litovsk (made final in 1918), the Russians left the war.

The departure of Russia from the war enabled the Germans to shift large numbers of troops from the Eastern to the Western Front, and to throw the German army into one last gigantic effort to defeat Britain and France before the Americans arrived. The German plan was to attack in northern France, divide the British army from the French, and then push the British northward to the Channel coast. The offensive came in March 1918 and almost succeeded. The British army finally regrouped just east of Amiens and by mid-April fought the Germans to a standstill. Final German assaults came in May and June but got nowhere. Though the British did not know it, the failed German offensive of spring 1918 had exhausted the last German reserves of physical, psychological, and material resources.

In mid-summer 1918, with American troops now pouring into France, the British and French went on the offensive. The weakened German lines gave way. The British attacked just north of the River Somme, and with more than four hundred tanks they pushed the Germans back to their pre-spring position. Late in August, the British attacked again, now across the old Somme battlefield, and then the French, Australians, New Zealanders, and Americans took turns in launching assaults. By early autumn, with their armies reeling back to the German border, the German generals were panicking. In September, Bulgaria (a German ally) asked for peace, and British troops under General Allenby swept the Turks out of Palestine. On October 4, 1918, the German government asked for an armistice on the basis of the American President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points.

The rapid collapse of the German army caught the British, like the French, off guard. The British had never developed any systematic war aims. They wanted to end permanently the German naval rivalry, to keep a number of German colonies, and to collect reparations from Germany for the loss of merchant shipping. But Wilson's Fourteen Points, although somewhat vague, went beyond territorial rearrangements to argue for national self-determination and making "a world safe for democracy." While the Allies were working out the precise meaning of the Fourteen Points, the Great War drew to a close. The glorious silence of peace returned to the world's battlefields at 11:00 am on November 11, 1918.

COUNTING THE COST

To assess the impact of the Great War on Britain, one would have to investigate long-term political, social, economic, and even psychological trends. That investigation will be one of the purposes of the next several

chapters. When we look at the immediate consequences of the war, three questions of enormous complexity stand out: (1) what did the British gain from the war? (2) what price did they pay? and (3) were the gains worth the costs?

In terms of power politics, the British gains were relatively small. They won Palestine, Trans-Jordan, and Iraq as *mandated* (that is, assigned as trusteeships) colonies from the Ottoman Empire. From Germany, Britain took Tanganyika, and other countries in the British Empire got Samoa, part of New Guinea, and German Southwest Africa. Britain eliminated the German navy as a rival, at least temporarily. Above all, the Germans were forced out of the Low Countries and France and were for the time being disarmed. More generally, Britain had avoided (again, temporarily) German domination of central and western Europe; thus, they had protected what most British statesmen had long regarded as a vital British interest. The British were able to accomplish all this by mobilizing vast material, financial, and human resources without abandoning either the parliamentary system or the essentials of personal liberty and the rule of law.

Yet the price was fearful. The British lost 750,000 men in combat—about 9 percent of all men under the age of forty-five. (The rest of the Empire lost an additional 250,000 men killed.) Another 1.5 million Britons were wounded, thousands of whom remained invalids. The upper and middle classes lost more men proportionately than the working class, both because a higher percentage of upper-class men volunteered and because the leadership positions they assumed in the army and air force were very dangerous. About 12 percent of all men who served were killed, but more than 15 percent of all army officers and 17 percent of all flying officers died. More than 19 percent of the Oxford students and graduates who served were killed, and 18 percent of those from Cambridge. This disproportionate loss of life gave the British elite the sense that a whole generation had been lost.

How are the effects of such losses to be measured? The British losses in manpower were not as great as those of the other great powers (France lost 1.3 million and Germany more than 1.8 million); still, the economic and social effects—not to mention the emotional effects—were severe, even though the downturn of the demographic curve was soon righted. To give two concrete examples, thirty-five Fellows of the Royal Society, Britain's elite scientific academy, were killed, as were fifty-five members of the Royal Institute of Chemistry. Likewise, promising businessmen, professionals, scholars, workers, and politicians perished. These were arguably the most valuable of all of Britain's wasted resources.

The economic losses are almost as difficult to calculate. The war caused enormous dislocations in British industry. It destroyed shipping tonnage equal to 40 percent of the 1914 British total. It directed a huge proportion of Britain's industrial production toward armaments. It consumed and wasted capital at a fantastic pace. It caused some industries—such as coal and steel—to be artificially built up, and others—such as cotton textiles and railways—to be run down. Furthermore, the war severely damaged Britain's ability to earn invisible income, on which the economy had increasingly depended, and it disrupted the world's markets, diverted British efforts from foreign trade, and turned Britain from a creditor to a debtor nation. Britain lost major capital investments in Russia and elsewhere and sold off about £550 million of British assets in the United States. In addition, the British borrowed £1.4 billion to finance the war, most of it from the United States. Although Britain in turn loaned £1.7 billion to the Allies, much of that sum was never recovered.

Yet not all the economic consequences of the war were negative. The war stimulated expansion of new industries such as the automotive and aircraft industries, and it encouraged technological innovations in industries in which Britain had lagged, such as machine tools, electrical power, artificial dyestuffs, petrochemicals, and metallurgy. The war encouraged cooperation and rationalization (that is, merging of a number of companies in a given industry to form one or a few conglomerates) in industry, and it seemed to push many manufacturers to improve production techniques.

All told, however, the British economic losses outweighed gains by a wide margin. The destruction of resources, the loss of overseas wealth, the forced abandonment of foreign markets, and the dislocation of the domestic economy—all proved to be a heavy burden in the subsequent decades. As we have seen, many old Victorian industries in the 1870s and 1880s were already beginning to face major problems. The Great War artificially propped up some but hastened the ruin of others, and it delivered a blow to Britain's position in world trade, both as a financier and as an exporter. The 1920s would see the beginnings of recovery and growth in new industries, but not in the old; hence, the war's economic effect in the most general terms was to serve as a watershed between the Victorian industrial economy and a newer but often troubled industrial economy.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONSEQUENCES

In social terms, the war left a more mixed balance sheet, with the credits perhaps outweighing the debits. One of the great paradoxes of British his-

tory is that this most costly of wars had positive results for some segments of the society. The social structure emerged from the war unscathed, for Britain remained a sharply delineated class society. Nevertheless, the war, with its steeply graduated income taxes and high death duties, tended to diminish the gap between the upper classes and the working class. The war rapidly accelerated the trend set in motion by the late-Victorian agricultural depression: it brought many of the landed families down some notches from their customary rarefied economic position. Some businessmen did very well from war contracts and investment in government securities, and in the House of Lords after 1918 there appeared the hard face of many a tough businessman. But other middle-class men, particularly from the lower levels of the class, suffered from high taxes and rising prices.

The working class, especially its heretofore unskilled and poorer sections, benefited from full employment and high wages. A sharp reduction in alcohol consumption and improved nutrition, both the results of government action, improved life expectancy in the working class. Trade union membership grew, and by 1920, 40 percent of working people belonged to unions. As we have seen, the Labour party emerged from the war in a much stronger position. In February 1918, the Fourth Reform Act granted the franchise to all men over twenty-one years old; Britain had become a democracy and working-class men constituted the largest sector of the electorate.

Some women also received the national franchise in the war's wake. As men realized the importance of women's contributions to the war effort, the consensus grew in governing circles that women had earned a place in the constitution. The Fourth Reform Act thus granted the first installment of the female franchise: women over age thirty who met a property qualification got the vote. Ironically, the age and property qualifications meant that the act did *not* enfranchise many of the young working-class women who had driven the war effort with their work in the munitions plants, steel factories, and iron foundries. Not until 1928 did all women over twenty-one years old finally receive the vote. In 1919, however, the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act abolished legal barriers to women's advancement in the civil service and the professions. Also in 1919, the first woman MP, Lady Astor, took a seat in the House of Commons.

Yet the war's impact on women was not unambiguous. The trauma of total war made people eager to return to normalcy, and that included what most still perceived as normal gender roles: men in the public sphere of paid employment and women in the private domestic sphere. Many, perhaps most, people viewed the wartime economic mobilization of women as an

emergency measure that should be reversed as quickly as possible. The aptly named Restoration of Prewar Practices Act of 1919 gave the women who had taken skilled factory jobs two weeks' pay and a train ticket home. By the early 1920s the percentage of women at work fell to the prewar level. Wage rates for women in the postwar workforce normally were only half those of men, and the proportion of women workers organized in the trade unions was much lower than that of men. The range of jobs open to women after the war did improve, but largely because of the growth of clerical, service, and light industrial work rather than because of any wartime breakthroughs. Moreover, married women who wanted or needed to work faced formidable obstacles, for the assumption was still that a married woman's proper sphere was the home; even the civil service released women when they married. The war's lengthy casualty lists heightened the fears among political leaders and policy makers of population decline (quantitative and qualitative) and led to renewed emphasis on the importance of motherhood and domesticity.

The war's impact on British high culture was more dramatic. The First World War permanently altered British *sensibility* (defined by students of literature as the almost instinctive sense that cultivated people of a culture share about what is correct and incorrect, authentic and inauthentic, in literature and ideas). Major alterations of the British sensibility were already underway before the war, as shown by the aesthetic and decadent movements and the Bloomsbury Group (see chapter 19). But the war accelerated those changes and gave them a particular twist. The war for many British intellectuals caused a bitter disillusionment with Western civilization, for it seemed to make a mockery of all the conventional higher ideals of politics, society, and religion and demanded altogether new ways of expressing human experience.

This new sensibility was evident in the writings of the war poets— young men serving in the trenches who sought to express their outrage at the horrors to which ordinary human beings were subjected. The best of these poets—Siegfried Sassoon (who survived the war), Wilfred Owen (killed in 1918), and Isaac Rosenberg (also killed in 1918)—managed to avoid sentimentality and self-pity while describing the realities of the war of attrition in short, moving verses. This task required a new poetic diction as well as complete honesty. Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est" exemplifies this new sensibility, as the poet tells of a victim of poison gas:

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—



Paul Nash, *We Are Making a New World*. Nash was appointed by the British government to be an official war artist. His striking modernist paintings, like this depiction of the Passchendaele battlefield, illustrate the ironic sensibility that characterized so much of postwar British culture.

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
 To children ardent for some glory,
 The old lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori.¹

For the generation writing in the 1920s, disillusionment with grand ideals was the only valid outlook on the world and irony the only appropriate tone of voice. Thus, in his autobiography (written when he was only thirty-four), Robert Graves, who had served on the Western Front, describes his combat experiences in terms of unheroic irony. He explains that the only values that counted in the trenches were professional competence and loyalty to one's comrades. After the war, Graves felt alienated by British society, which seemed all too anxious to return to a prewar world that no longer existed. For writers such as Graves, the brutal contrast between high hopes and reality, innocence and wisdom, allowed only a posture of mocking humor. No longer could British poets indulge in high-flown words such as

¹How sweet and noble it is to die for one's country.

steed or charger, the foe, or the fallen; only stark, plain words such as *horse, the enemy, and the dead* would do. The war seemed to destroy the grounds for all values, yet it also seemed to polarize experience between friend and enemy, good and evil.

In sum, one can say that the British were on the winning side in the Great War and so preserved their status as a great power, but they found that the war had severely damaged their ability to behave as a great power and had riven deep fissures in British society and culture. Clearly the war accelerated certain improvements in status and standards of living for social groups that had enjoyed the least power in Victorian society. But these changes might have happened anyway, and in any case few of the British in 1919 would have said that these gains were worth the losses in blood and treasure. The young soldier-poet Wilfrid Gibson put it this way:

We who are left, how shall we look again
 Happily on the sun, or feel the rain,
 Without remembering how they who went
 Ungrudgingly, and spent
 Their all for us, loved, too, the sun and rain?

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Chapter 24

The War and the Celtic Countries: Ireland Leaves the Union, 1914–1923

The First World War challenged the British state to mobilize its people and its material resources on a massive scale. But as we have seen, the British state—officially the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland—formally had existed only since 1801 and even by 1914 had not achieved complete integration or blending of its peoples. Indeed, the Great War broke out during the height of revival on the “Celtic fringe” and with civil war looming in Ireland. The vital question was, would the British state itself hold together under the immense pressure of total war. The answer turned out to be: “not completely.” Scotland and Wales did rally to the cause and became more *British* than ever, but Ireland (or more accurately, its southern twenty-six counties), broke with the Union.

THE IMPACT OF THE GREAT WAR ON SCOTLAND AND WALES

In Scotland and Wales, the national revivals had resulted in self-identities that were British as well as Scottish or Welsh. The war experience reinforced the British part of these dual identities. In order to recruit men for military service and to rally support for the war effort, the government in London emphasized “Britain” rather than “England” in all its appeals and propaganda. Kitchener’s famous recruiting poster, for instance, was meant for Britons in general. The men of Scotland and Wales volunteered for service at a rate at least equal to that in England: in all three countries (England, Scotland, and Wales) the proportion of men who served was more than 40 percent of the male population between the ages of fifteen



A Highlanders' regiment charges on the Western Front, September, 1914.

and forty-nine. Likewise, the casualty rates of Scottish and Welsh troops were about the same as those of English troops. The people of England, Scotland, and Wales bore the burdens of war equally.

The experience of war tended to break down regional barriers. The 650,000 men who served in the navy were organized without regard to regional origin. Englishmen, Scotsmen, and Welshmen sailed together as Britons. In the first years of the war, however, the army organized on territorial lines: Scots were recruited into Scottish units (such as the Scots Guards and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders), and the Welsh into Welsh units (the Royal Welch Fusiliers, the Welsh Regiment, and so on), although officers were generally assigned without reference to local origin. The rate of casualties and the need for rapid replacement soon broke down the territorial purity of the army's enlisted ranks. By the end of the war, Englishmen, Scotsmen, and Welshmen all served in the same units.

Likewise, military training moved thousands of men from one part of the British Isles to another. Scottish and Welsh soldiers trained in southern England, and English troops served in Scotland. Sometimes the results of

this large-scale internal movement of soldiers had humorous results, as provincial men saw localities and heard accents other than their own for the first time. On one occasion, two English sentries in northern Scotland arrested a Gaelic-speaking woman, thinking that she was a German. On another occasion, an obviously bewildered group of Scottish troops at the Oxford railway station told a helpful inquirer, “We are going to Berlin. But we don’t quite know at what junctions we are to change on the way.” After the war, regional identities and loyalties were never the same again, and the sense of being part of one Britain was much stronger.

Yet the effects of the war were not homogeneous because the economic conditions and the cultural revivals of Scotland and Wales were different. In Scotland, the economy suffered the same sort of dislocations as in the rest of Britain, but with different social and political results. In the short run, the Great War vastly increased the demand for ships and munitions from the industrial area around Glasgow and the River Clyde. Clydeside became the chief munitions manufacturing center in Britain. The war also expanded production of certain specialized textiles such as canvas for tenting and jute for sandbags. Unfortunately, this artificial demand collapsed after the war. The war also deprived Scotland of its Continental markets for fish, and the Scots never regained them. As a result of such disruptions, some four hundred thousand people emigrated from Scotland to England and overseas in the 1920s.

Meanwhile, the war radicalized a large segment of the Scottish working class. Shipyard and engineering workers on Clydeside were in a position to demand higher wages, and they sought to protect their status by resisting dilution of their ranks by unskilled laborers. Militant trade unionism, socialism, and even syndicalism took a strong hold. The shop steward movement, which grew up to replace the leadership of the official trade unions, gave the region the reputation of being “Red Clydeside.” The Scottish working class even before 1914 had been turning in a militant direction because of unemployment and structural changes in industry. The war heightened this already growing class antagonism and therefore had the effect of breaking the long-standing Scottish working-class commitment to liberalism and the Liberal party. In the 1920s, the Scottish working class shifted heavily to Labour, and class loyalty tended to replace Scottish national loyalty.

The general trend in Wales was similar but not identical. Initially the war was very popular in Wales. Recruiters found an enthusiastic response, as the Welsh expressed their British identity and at the same time sympathized

with “little Belgium” and “gallant little Serbia.” Many Welsh Nonconformist ministers denounced the Germans in their sermons, and local and national *eisteddfodau* became patriotic celebrations. Lloyd George was able to work his fellow Welshmen into near hysteria for the war. Nevertheless, a few Nonconformists remained pacifists, and the Welsh coal miners generally opposed conscription. These antiwar sentiments helped turn Wales from Liberal to Labour in the last years of the war.

Changes in the structure of Welsh society and economy caused by the war also helped erode Welsh liberalism. The Great War brought about a sudden decline of traditional Welsh landed society. Wartime demand raised prices for Welsh agricultural products such as grain, milk, and livestock. This raised land values, but the government controlled rents. The tenants, consequently, fared better than the landlords in wartime conditions. Meanwhile, higher taxes—both income and inheritance duties—were squeezing the landlords. For these reasons, Welsh landlords in large numbers sold off their estates to tenant farmers. The long tradition of a dominant gentry in Wales came to an end, and thenceforth owner-occupiers farmed Welsh land. As the Welsh landlords faded from the scene, so also did one of the principal reasons for popular adherence to the Liberal party, which had for half a century given voice to anti-landlordism in Wales.

The Great War also had a major impact on Welsh industry. It stimulated the expansion of heavy industries in South Wales, coal mining above all, but also iron and steel. Industrial relations worsened as Welsh coal miners raised their demands for better pay and better treatment. The miners’ ideology became more radical, with socialism and syndicalism becoming very strong. The news of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917 met widespread approval in South Wales. High rents and food shortages in 1918 further increased labor militancy. The resulting intense class consciousness—the Welsh equivalent of Red Clydeside—shattered the traditional collaboration of Welsh laboring people with the Liberal party. As in Scotland, class consciousness replaced Welsh national consciousness.

Other forces also eroded support for liberalism and the Liberals. The Liberal government had approved disestablishment of the Anglican church in Wales in 1914, though its implementation was suspended for the duration of the war. With disestablishment achieved, the landlords selling out, and Lloyd George ensconced in Downing Street, the future of Welsh Liberals must have seemed bright. But these achievements had exhausted the Welsh Liberal agenda; therefore, while the war was worsening class relations and accelerating a working-class trend toward Labour, the Liberals had

nothing new to offer. Lloyd George was able to hold Wales for his personal branch of the Liberal party in 1918, but thereafter the Liberal party in Wales collapsed.

IRELAND AND THE GREAT WAR, 1914–1916

The war had its most dramatic impact and caused the most damage to the United Kingdom in Ireland. As the war was breaking out, both Irish nationalists and the Ulster Unionists were building large armed paramilitary forces, and they seemed to be heading for violent confrontation as the third Home Rule bill passed through its final stages into law. Over time, events related directly to the war made Home Rule obsolete and opened the way for the radical separatist brand of Irish nationalism. This was an ironic development because the war had delayed the confrontation between Irish nationalists and Unionists and because the war was to involve a smaller proportion of Irishmen than Englishmen, Scotsmen, or Welshmen. Yet the pressures of war strained the already weak ties of Catholic Ireland to England beyond the breaking point. England's difficulty, so the Irish nationalist saying went, was Ireland's opportunity.

On the day war broke out in August 1914, the leader of the Home Rule party, John Redmond, made a dramatic pledge to the British Parliament. The Home Rulers, he declared, stood with Britain against German militarism in the hour of crisis. Let the Irish Volunteers and the Ulster Volunteers defend Ireland while the British army concentrated on the Germans in Flanders. The leader of Ulster Unionism, Sir Edward Carson, pledged the support of the Ulstermen. These two manifestos of Irish loyalty to Britain were well received by the British and Irish publics alike.

However, when Redmond took the additional step of urging the Irish Volunteers to enlist in the British army, he split the Irish nationalist movement. Redmond argued that the Irish had a duty to fight in a conflict centered on the rights of small states (Serbia and Belgium) and he hoped to win British gratitude so that at the war's end Home Rule would be implemented without the exclusion of any Ulster counties. Many nationalists, however, could not conceive of fighting in a British uniform. The Volunteers split apart. About 110,000 remained with Redmond. Of these National Volunteers, some 25,000 went on to enlist in the British army. Approximately 12,000 broke away to form a new Irish Volunteer organization, a more militant and extremist force devoted to winning Ireland independence rather than Home Rule.

In subsequent months, Redmond recruited actively for the British armed forces. At first, Irishmen flocked to the colors, with 50,000 joining in first six months. But as British losses on the Western Front mounted, and as the war settled into its bloody stalemate, Irish enlistments (at least outside of Ulster) fell off. In the end, even though the Irish and Scottish populations were about the same size (about 4.5 million) in 1914, only about 200,000 Irishmen, including the 58,000 already in the regular army in 1914, served in the British armed services during the war, as compared to 688,000 Scotsmen. The British contributed to their problem of recruiting in Ireland by refusing to organize the southern Irish army units into an Irish corps with its own badges and symbols. Yet at the same time, the strongly unionist British high command allowed the Ulster Unionists to form their own purely Protestant division, the Red Hand of Ulster. This division distinguished itself in many battles, including the Battle of the Somme, which afterward was to loom large in Ulster Protestant hearts and minds.

The breakaway Irish Volunteers meanwhile came under the secret control of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). This was the new generation of the old Fenian Brotherhood. The official head of the Irish Volunteers was Eoin MacNeill, the scholar of early Irish history and leader of the Gaelic League who had led the Volunteers before the split. MacNeill in 1913 insisted that Irish nationalists form themselves into an armed force like the Ulster Volunteers, for he knew that one day Ireland might have to use force against Britain: "They have rights who dare to maintain them." But MacNeill also believed that a rebellion against Britain would be militarily and morally wrong unless there was a real chance for success. He believed that while at war Britain would use every ounce of its power to defeat a rebellion in the British Isles. The IRB men who penetrated the Volunteers felt differently. They thought that, because of the war, Britain would be unable to send enough troops to put down an insurrection in Ireland, and therefore they became determined to overthrow British rule before the war ended. This resolution led to the great watershed in twentieth-century Irish history—the Easter Rebellion of 1916.

THE EASTER REBELLION, 1916

The chief IRB men who put themselves into leadership positions within the Irish Volunteers were Patrick Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh, and Joseph Mary Plunkett. Poets and Gaelic enthusiasts, all were motivated by romantic dreams of the Irish revolutionary tradition. Pearse was the most fiery and

most important. Trained as a barrister but devoted to poetry, Pearse in 1908 had founded a school dedicated to educating Irish boys in Irish language and literature. Like others in the younger generation of Irish cultural nationalists, he believed that the sordid mediocrity of modern civilization, typified by the unheroic post-Parnell Home Rule party, needed to be purged by sacrifice. Thus, he greeted the Great War as an opportunity for sacrifice and redemption: “The old heart of the earth needed to be warmed with the red wine of the battlefields.” Deeply influenced by mystical Catholicism, Pearse by 1916 concluded that Ireland needed a blood sacrifice—a rebellion that would fail in the short run but would redeem the honor of the Irish people in the long run. Pearse, in short, combined the myth of the army of the Gael with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and so made ready to die for Ireland—and to take other, more innocent revolutionaries with him.

Pearse and the IRB were not the only Irishmen ready to rebel. James Connolly, the labor leader who headed the Citizen Army of two hundred men, believed that a rebellion *would* win, not least because as a socialist he thought the British government would not allow themselves to destroy private property in order to defeat the rebels. In the hours before the insurrection, Connolly too fell prey to the vision of noble sacrifice. Indeed, he vowed that this Citizen Army would fight even if the Irish Volunteers did not. Shortly before the rebellion began, he told a friend, apparently without regret, “We are going out to be slaughtered.”

Another advocate of rebellion was Sir Roger Casement, an Anglo-Irish career foreign service officer, a humanitarian activist, and a passionate Irish nationalist. Casement already had arranged for the purchase of fifteen hundred rifles in Germany for the Volunteers in May–July 1914. When the Great War broke out, Casement raised funds from the American-Irish nationalist organization Clan na Gael, and returned to Germany for more military aid. Casement believed that Germany would want to weaken Britain by helping Ireland secure its independence. Unfortunately for the Irish rebels, Casement found the Germans skeptical and uncooperative. He was able to purchase from the Germans only twenty thousand rifles taken from the Russians on the Eastern Front.

Meanwhile, the IRB leaders set the date of the rising for Easter 1916. Knowing that MacNeill would oppose them, the IRB men kept their plans secret from him and his staff. They planned to arrange for the Volunteers to turn out for training and drill on Easter Sunday, precipitate a rebellion, and then by presenting MacNeill with a *fait accompli*, force him to commit the Volunteers to the rebellion. Casement was to land with the purchased rifles

and munitions just before the rising. To spur MacNeill into action, the IRB during the week before Easter forged a document that purported to be a British plan to disarm the Volunteers.

MacNeill suspected that scheming was going on behind his back, and four days before Easter he finally learned of the planned insurrection. Furious with the plotters, he cancelled the orders for the Volunteers' training exercises scheduled for Easter Sunday. Then, when MacNeill heard that Casement was bringing arms from Germany, he reversed himself. On the day before Easter, when he learned that the ship carrying the rifles had been discovered and scuttled and that Casement had been arrested, he reversed himself again. MacNeill's final order against insurrection reached most of the Volunteers, but the IRB and Citizen Army leaders in Dublin—Pearse, Connolly, MacDonagh, Plunkett, and others—decided to go ahead with the rising on the day after Easter.

On Easter Monday some sixteen hundred men, including about fourteen hundred from the Volunteers and two hundred from the Citizen Army, rebelled against British rule in Ireland by occupying major buildings in Dublin. Apparently they hoped that the nation would rise spontaneously to their support. They were sadly mistaken. The great majority of the Volunteers as well as the country as a whole remained quiet. The citizenry of



Soldiers and civilians shoot each other on the streets of Dublin during the Easter Rising of 1916.

Dublin looked on in amazement as bands of armed Volunteers seized the General Post Office (GPO) and several other buildings near the center of the city. Shortly after noon, Pearse appeared on the Post Office steps to proclaim the establishment of the provisional government of the Irish Republic. The proclamation denounced British usurpation of power in Ireland and claimed “the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman” (including those in Ulster). The new Republic combined the ideals of Young Ireland with those of socialism in ringing but ambiguous phrases: “We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible.”

The rebellion, as it turned out, lasted only a week. The people of Ireland did not rally to its support. Yet in the minds of some Irish nationalists to the present day, the Republic proclaimed at Easter 1916 remains the only legitimate Irish state. It holds a sacred status, hallowed by the blood of martyrs. Within a few days, the British government had rushed thousands of troops to Dublin to support the Royal Irish Constabulary against the rebels. On Wednesday, the British began using artillery to blast the Republican strongholds. On Friday, the main rebel force was flushed from the burning GPO. On Saturday (April 29, 1916), Pearse surrendered, and other rebel commanders soon followed. The rising by then had cost the lives of 76 rebels, 300 civilians, and about 130 British soldiers and policemen.

THE ADVENT OF SINN FEIN

The early reaction of Irish public opinion to the Easter Rising was highly unfavorable, but the British proceeded to throw away their chance to consolidate the position of constitutional Irish nationalism. The troops treated ordinary Dubliners with contempt, and in many cases, brutality. They arrested about 3,500 men and women, of whom 170 were imprisoned and 1,800 interned in England, even though many had no connection with the Rising. More importantly, the British, who had declared martial law in Ireland, tried and convicted the leaders of the rebellion before military courts. They executed fifteen of them, one after another, in a ten-day period in May 1916. (In addition, Casement was hanged in England later that August.) Pearse, MacDonagh, and Plunkett were among those shot, as was Connolly, who had been so badly wounded that he had to be strapped to a chair to face the firing squad. Every volley from the firing squads moved Irish public opinion one more notch closer to sympathy with the rebel

nationalists. After fifteen deaths, the British government realized it was arousing sympathy for radical nationalism and halted the executions. This decision saved the lives of Countess Markiewicz, a passionate nationalist and feminist, and Eamon de Valera, the only rebel commander to escape execution. But the British cessation of the executions came too late: the dead rebel leaders had been made into martyrs and now joined the pantheon of sainted revolutionary nationalists from Wolfe Tone to Thomas Davis. As W. B. Yeats said in his great poem “Easter 1916,”

I write it out in verse—
 MacDonagh and MacBride
 And Connolly and Pearse
 Now and in time to be,
 Wherever green is worn,
 Are changed, changed utterly:
 A terrible beauty is born.

From that point on, constitutional nationalism in Ireland was finished.

With a view toward retaining Irish support for the war effort and placating public opinion in the United States, where Irish nationalism was a major political factor, Prime Minister Asquith deputed Lloyd George to find a quick solution to the Irish problem. Lloyd George probably was on an impossible mission, but he made the situation worse with characteristic duplicity. He offered Redmond immediate implementation of Home Rule on condition of the temporary exclusion of six of the nine counties of Ulster. To Ulster leader Carson, on the other hand, Lloyd George promised permanent exclusion of the six counties. The contradiction between these promises was revealed in parliamentary debate, and the British Conservatives and Ulster Unionists rejected the arrangement anyway. Lloyd George’s efforts at reconciliation thus failed, hammering one last nail in the Home Rulers’ coffin.

Events in Ireland were now flowing strongly in favor of Sinn Fein. It had not as an organization participated in the Rising, but in both Britain and Ireland, the rebels were often called the Sinn Fein Volunteers. As Irish public sentiment shifted toward the rebels, Sinn Fein won political honor, whereas the Home Rulers lost credit. Under the leadership of Arthur Griffith, Sinn Fein had for more than a decade preached a separatist strategy whereby the Irish simply would refuse to cooperate with either the British Parliament or the British executive in Ireland. The IRB leaders who survived the Easter Rebellion now threw their support to Sinn Fein, which was a legal political organization, in order to take advantage of the disillusionment of the Irish public with the Home Rulers, and Eamon de Valera (1882–1975) even became Sinn Fein’s president.

At the same time, the Lloyd George coalition (formed in December 1916), faced with severe manpower problems on the battlefronts of the Great War, sought to apply conscription not only to England, Scotland, and Wales, but also to Ireland. When in April 1918 the government decided it could delay Irish conscription no longer, Irish public opinion (except in Ulster) was solidly opposed. Even the Home Rulers opposed conscription, but because they had in 1914–15 encouraged recruitment, they now earned little credit. Sinn Fein, which led the anti-conscription fight in Ireland, won yet more approval. The British responded by trying to suppress Sinn Fein, the Irish Volunteers, and even the Gaelic League. These steps proved unsuccessful. Sinn Fein's membership grew, and party candidates fared well in parliamentary by-elections. By the war's end in November 1918, Sinn Fein had become the most powerful political party in all but the six counties of Ulster with a Protestant majority.

In the British general election of December 1918, as we will see, Lloyd George's coalition, consisting of his segment of the Liberals and all the Conservatives, won a big victory over the Asquith Liberals and the Labour party. But in Ireland, the election was a resounding victory for Sinn Fein, which won seventy-three seats to six for the Home Rulers and twenty-six for the Unionists. The Sinn Fein representatives, as they had promised, refused to take their seats in Parliament at Westminster. Instead, they gathered in Dublin, calling themselves the *Dáil Éireann* (the Parliament of Ireland). They claimed that they now constituted the Parliament of the Irish Republic—in theory, the same Republic established by Pearse and the Easter Rebellion of 1916.

THE ANGLO-IRISH WAR AND THE TREATY OF 1921

The establishment of the *Dáil Éireann* soon led to a period of savage warfare in Ireland that was to last until 1923. There were two phases in this conflict: (1) the Anglo-Irish War of 1919–21, in which Irish nationalists fought the British, and (2) the Irish Civil War of 1922–23, in which factions of Irish nationalists fought each other. In these years, twenty-six counties of Ireland won autonomy, but six northeastern counties of Ulster were partitioned off as Northern Ireland. At the same time, habits of brutality and killing were formed that even today stain Irish affairs.

The Anglo-Irish War, a guerrilla war between Irish nationalists and the forces of Britain, was the inevitable result of the *Dáil's* decision to establish a parallel governmental structure in Ireland as an alternative to British

rule. The Dáil reaffirmed in 1918 the declaration of Irish independence proclaimed at Easter 1916, and it selected representatives to the peace conference that was to meet at Versailles. Furthermore, the Dáil set up an alternative court system, a land bank, and a board to settle disputes in industrial relations. In effect, two different governments, one British and one Irish, claimed sovereignty in Ireland. The British at first tried to ignore the Dáil's actions, but in January 1919 shooting started between the Irish Volunteers—who now called themselves the Irish Republican Army, or IRA—and British police.

For the next two and a half years, the British and Irish engaged in a brutal conflict of terrorism and counterterrorism. The Dáil, with de Valera as its president, was on the run and met only in secret. The IRA operated outside the Dáil's effective control. Given the vast superiority in numbers and armament of the British forces, the IRA had to adopt the hit-and-run tactics of guerrilla warfare. Its soldiers wore civilian clothes and took refuge among the Irish populace, emerging to ambush military patrols and convoys and to assassinate enemy soldiers and spies. Led by Michael Collins, an extremely able and tough fighter, the IRA developed a ruthlessness and a fanaticism necessary for survival but poisonous to the humane qualities that would be necessary in peacetime.

The British fought fire with fire. Because they refused to acknowledge the Dáil's existence, the British also refused to admit that they were embroiled in a true war in Ireland. To them the war remained a police action, but one conducted in conditions of open ferocity. Hence, the government did not send the British army to Ireland, but depended on the Royal Irish Constabulary and powerful supporting forces recruited in England. None of these elements exercised the discipline of the regular army. The supplementary forces, the so-called Black and Tans (from the mixture of dark green police uniforms and khaki military uniforms that they wore) and Auxiliaries (or Auxis) were recruited from ex-army officers and enlisted men. In the face of IRA tactics, they engaged in ambushes, assassinations, and torture. Like their opponents, they often operated outside of control by their government, in this case, London. And in 1920, the government itself sanctioned the practice of conducting reprisals on entire Irish villages and communities in order to deprive the guerillas of popular support. British forces outnumbered the IRA by fifty thousand to ten thousand, but they were not able to win an outright victory.

The British public meanwhile became sickened by the killing in Ireland. By 1919 British opinion had finally accepted the idea of Home Rule for Ire-

land. Now, already weary of warfare and casualty lists, and having come to believe that they had fought the Great War for democracy and national self-determination, the British had no stomach for the seemingly endless brutalities in Ireland. Reprisals such as the sacking of the village of Balbriggan offended the British sense of fair play. As the eminent writer G. K. Chesterton put it, “To burn down a factory and a row of shops because a comrade has been murdered is not self-defense—it is senseless revenge.” Asquithian Liberals and Labourites urged an end to the fighting, as did an increasing number of Nonconformists and Anglicans. Accommodation with Irish nationalism seemed the only acceptable policy for Britain—and the only way to maintain the unity of the British Empire.

Lloyd George responded to the growing antiwar sentiment by reviving Home Rule. In 1920 his coalition government, though it was dominated by Conservative Unionists, carried the Better Government of Ireland Act. It created one Home Rule Parliament for the twenty-six counties of nationalist Ireland and another one for the six northeastern counties of Ulster. In southern Ireland this act never came into operation, but it did in Ulster; thus, it was the instrument by which Ireland was formally partitioned.

The Dáil and the IRA rejected the Better Government of Ireland Act on grounds that Home Rule was no longer enough, and they continued fighting into 1921. Gradually, however, the IRA's resources became exhausted. By the summer of 1921, the IRA could command no more than five thousand guerrillas. Fortunately for them, the British also were approaching exhaustion, not of men and materiel, but of willpower. Under pressure from public opinion at home and abroad, and especially in the United States, Lloyd George finally in July 1921 offered the Irish a truce and invited them to negotiate a treaty. The chief of the Imperial General Staff told Lloyd George that his only alternatives were “to go all out or to get out.” And Lloyd George knew public opinion would not tolerate going all out.

The peace negotiations between Britain and the Irish nationalists were conducted in two stages. In the first, Lloyd George dealt directly with de Valera and offered *limited dominion status*: southern Ireland would have self-government within the Empire, but it would have to recognize the partition of Ireland, contribute to the British war debt, and allow the British to keep military and naval bases in Ireland. For de Valera, these terms were not enough for Ireland.

In the second phase, de Valera stayed home and Lloyd George negotiated with a delegation from the Dáil, led by Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith. The Irish negotiators rejected mere Home Rule, but the British

regarded the idea of an independent Irish Republic (the *Republican* solution) as out of the question. The most the Irish could hope for was *external association*, by which they would freely associate as a republic with the British Empire (or Commonwealth, as it was now coming to be called). What Lloyd George offered, however, was something less: continued partition and dominion status for the twenty-six counties. Ireland would have self-rule but, like Australia and Canada, would agree to allegiance to the British Crown as well as to membership in the Commonwealth. After much tense negotiation, Lloyd George threatened to renew the war if the Irish delegates rejected his offer; he was not bluffing, but he also suggested that a future boundary commission would so reduce the size of a separate Ulster that the partition would collapse. The Irish delegates felt that they had no choice and agreed to the treaty on December 6, 1921. Thus, the Act of Union of 1800 and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland that it created were officially ended.

CIVIL WAR IN IRELAND, 1922–1923

The Anglo-Irish Treaty closed an important chapter in Anglo-Irish relations, but it did not end the fighting in Ireland. When the treaty was debated in the Irish Dáil, it met strong opposition from the most militant nationalists. Many Republicans rejected dominion status because they would accept nothing less than the sacred Republic of 1916. Although de Valera did not insist on a republic, he opposed the treaty on grounds that it did not go far enough toward real independence for Ireland. For him and others the symbolic matter of pledging allegiance to the British Crown was intolerable. The pro-treaty forces, led by IRA commander Michael Collins, argued that dominion status was all the Irish could get, that it represented a big advance over Home Rule, and that it would constitute a base from which Ireland could move toward full independence. After long and bitter debate, the Dáil approved the treaty by a narrow margin.

Both de Valera and a number of IRA commanders refused to accept the Dáil's verdict. Subsequently, de Valera resigned as president of the Dáil, and with his support, the dissident IRA members took up arms against the treaty and the Dáil. Thus, at the same time that the pro-treaty forces were assuming responsibility for governing Ireland, now known as the Irish Free State, they also had to fight a civil war against many of their former comrades-in-arms, who resisted the Free State on behalf of the now mythical Republic of 1916.

This phase of civil war in Ireland lasted from April 1922 until May 1923. The Free Staters won a general election in June 1922 over the anti-treaty faction by nearly 80 percent to 20 percent; these figures suggest the relative size of the forces. But a majority of IRA heroes from the war against the British fought against the treaty. They claimed the title of the IRA—that is, that *they* were the true army of the 1916 Republic. Michael Collins led the pro-treaty army, which now had to face the same kind of guerrilla tactics that he himself had devised. Ambushes, assassinations, and military executions again prevailed in Ireland. The Free State, in fact, executed seventy-seven of the anti-treaty guerrillas, including several of the most prominent commanders; this was three times as many executions as the British carried out between 1919 and 1921. Collins himself was killed in an IRA ambush.

The ruthlessness of the Free Staters and the impatience of most Irish civilians with the incessant killing finally persuaded the IRA that they could not win. Urged by de Valera to make their peace with the Free State, most of the IRA simply stopped fighting and turned in their arms, but without surrendering. The IRA men never gave up their view that the Republic of 1916 was the only true Irish state and therefore that the treaty, the Free State, and the partition of 1920–21 were illegitimate. For the rest of the twentieth century, they and their descendants continued their often violent struggle to restore the Republic of 1916 and a *united* Ireland.

Meanwhile, in the six counties of Northern Ireland (often mistakenly called simply Ulster), the subordinate Parliament created by the Better Government of Ireland Act of 1920 had come into existence. Ironically, then, the Ulster Protestant Unionists got exactly what they had resisted since 1886—Home Rule! The new Northern Ireland province of Great Britain was born in conditions of sectarian hatred and urban terrorism. The IRA in Ulster resisted the partition and the establishment of the Northern Ireland provincial government. However, the power of the Protestant Unionists, supported by the British government, was much too strong. The British government had drawn the boundary around Northern Ireland to exclude many Catholics and therefore to ensure a two-to-one majority of Protestant Unionists over the Catholic nationalist minority. Thus, the IRA in the North had less support than in the twenty-six counties, and the nationalists in 1920–21 had no chance either to thwart the will of the Unionists or to play an influential role in the formation of the provincial government and politics. Few of the Northern Ireland Catholics in fact wanted to play such a role because most of them rejected the legitimacy of the province in the first place.

Taken as a whole, the years of passion and bloodshed in Ireland between 1916 and 1923 had established an autonomous dominion, but they had also partitioned the island and created a Unionist province in its most highly industrialized and prosperous region. It is hard to imagine that any of these events would have occurred but for the Great War. England's difficulty did prove to be Ireland's opportunity, but it also turned out to be the Home Rulers' catastrophe and a united Ireland's tragedy.

EPILOGUE: IRELAND, 1921–1939

In the two decades following the end of the civil war in 1923, the Irish Free State succeeded in establishing itself as a workable independent country, though one with more serious economic problems and a more stagnant society than the nationalists had anticipated. The treaty (and its partition) continued to be the dividing line, not only in the island as a whole, but also within southern Irish politics: parties aligned themselves mainly around the issue of whether the treaty was acceptable or not. The pro-treaty Free Staters organized themselves as the *Cumann na nGaedheal* party and ruled until 1932. This proved to be a conservative, right-of-center party in a society dominated by the Catholic middle class and the Catholic church. (In the 1930s, the *Cumann na nGaedheal* party merged with right-wing groups to form a new right-of-center party, *Fine Gael* [Family of Gaels], which still exists.) In 1925, the boundary commission called for by the treaty prepared to enlarge the borders of Northern Ireland rather than cut them back as Lloyd George had promised. The *Cumann na nGaedheal* government quickly accepted the existing boundary. This action gave the Republicans popular ground on which to criticize the founders of the Free State.

The Free State government, meanwhile, treated the IRA as a criminal organization and in 1921 formally outlawed it. The IRA for its part continued to regard the Free State as illegitimate, and Sinn Féin refused to participate in the Dáil. De Valera, however, did not wish to remain forever in the political wilderness, and in 1925 he organized a new political party, *Fianna Fáil* (Warriors of Ireland). He and the more moderate Republicans gradually moved back into more constitutional politics. In 1927, de Valera actually took his seat in the Dáil, while insisting that he had only signed the registry book (and in pencil at that) and not taken the oath. This highly complex, aloof, somewhat mysterious but charismatic man was a curious combination of romantic, Gaelic-League nationalist and pragmatic politician. He led



DeValera speaks, 1926: *Eamon de Valera survived the Easter Rebellion, led the antitreaty forces within Irish nationalism, and dominated Irish politics into the 1960s.*

Fianna Fáil to victory in 1932, and over the course of the next forty years made an indelible mark on Ireland.

In office in the 1930s, de Valera (1882–1975) led the Free State toward state action in social policies, in part to counter the effects of worldwide depression, and toward more complete separation from Britain. Fianna Fáil's social policies were not socialist, but they did commit significant funds to welfare benefits for the unemployed, widows, and orphans and to old-age pensions and housing construction. As for relations with Britain, de Valera openly criticized the partition, stopped the turnover of land purchase payments to Britain, and dropped the oath of allegiance. The British were not pleased, but they elected not to use force against the Free State.

In 1937, de Valera presented Ireland with a new constitution. It claimed that Ireland was “a sovereign, independent, democratic state”—a republic in all but name. The British already had given up the right of Parliament to legislate for the dominions by the Statute of Westminster (1931). Now, in 1937, de Valera's new Irish constitution set up in Dublin a Parliament of two houses, with a president as the head of state and a prime minister as chief executive. In many ways this constitution, which forms the basis for today's Irish Republic, showed the profound influence of the British example. But

de Valera's constitution also claimed sovereignty over *all* of Ireland and by Article 44 recognized the "special position" of the Roman Catholic church as the religion of the majority of the Irish people. Both provisions, like de Valera's general Irish-Ireland outlook, were highly provocative to the Northern Ireland Protestants.

The relative political stability of the Free State after 1923 justified the predictions of generations of Irish nationalists: the Irish could in fact govern themselves responsibly. But in economy and society, independence did not work miracles. Ireland remained very much in the British economic orbit. Agriculture and industry alike were sluggish, and the Irish standard of living lagged behind that of Britain—indeed, behind that of Northern Ireland as well. Emigration continued to drain off many of the most talented young Irish men and women, so that in the 1920s, the population of the Free State fell below three million.

The Free State government vigorously tried to promote the Irish language by preserving the *Gaeltacht* (the Irish-speaking conclave of the western counties) and by establishing Irish as the national language. Irish became the language of record in the courts and the Dáil's debates, for instance, and civil servants had to be competent in Irish. Schoolchildren spent almost half their school day on Gaelic lessons. But the number and proportion of Irish speakers continued to decline because of the utility of English. Increasingly, the Irish-Ireland point of view came to be seen by progressive Irish men and women—and especially by literary intellectuals—as the outlook of a backward, provincial, exclusively Catholic section of the people. Certainly the Free State was built on a thoroughly conservative Catholic society. The population was 95 percent Catholic, and though the Catholics made no effort whatsoever to persecute the Protestant minority, the Catholic clergy and bishops dominated education, public morality, and to a significant degree social policy.

The degree to which the Free State was a Catholic country was not lost on the Unionists of Northern Ireland. These hard-bitten folk suffered from a severe case of *fortress mentality* in the first place. Even though the Protestants of Northern Ireland in the 1920s outnumbered the Catholics by one million to five hundred thousand, they lived in fear that they would be swallowed up by Catholic nationalist Ireland. Union with Britain became their sacred principle. A great deal of political power resided in the Orange Lodges, the militant Protestant clubs founded in the eighteenth century. In the Northern Ireland Parliament at Stormont, outside Belfast, Protestants used majority rule to reduce Catholics to second-class citizens. They abol-

ished the proportional representation that the British had put in the Better Government of Ireland Act; they gerrymandered local government districts to deprive Catholics of influence in local government; they set up an exclusively Protestant (and habitually brutal) police force, the B-Specials; and they discriminated against Catholics in housing, employment, and education. Working-class and upper-class Protestants cooperated in this mistreatment of the mostly working-class Catholic people of Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, religion and nationality were stronger than class consciousness.

The Catholics of Northern Ireland contributed to this situation by refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the province. They typically gave their allegiance to Ireland—meaning a united, nationalist Ireland. In effect, they withdrew from the politics of Northern Ireland until 1932, when their representatives first agreed to sit in Stormont. Even then it was clear that the opposition in Northern Ireland, representing as it did the Catholic minority, would never be able to become the majority and form a government. In Northern Ireland, then, genuine parliamentary government could never work. All of this came into being with the knowledge and approval of the British government, which was only too happy to leave Northern Ireland to the Unionist majority and thus for the first time in more than a century get Ireland off the British political agenda.

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Chapter 25

Economy, Society, and Culture between the Wars, 1919–1939

A leading historian once wrote that British culture after the Great War showed “evidence of minds scorched by war, and reacting against a nervous strain which was almost unbearable.”¹ The same might be said of the economy and society. Although British politicians and businessmen agreed that Britain should return as quickly as possible to the “normal” conditions that had prevailed before 1914, such a return proved impossible. Economy, society, and culture had been so altered that the so-called golden years of the Victorian and Edwardian eras could never be recovered. Many features of British life after 1919 were clearly “modern,” and the attempts to return to former conditions only multiplied the problems the nation faced. Yet the vestiges of nineteenth-century economic and social institutions continued to hang on. This quality of insufficient change led at least one veteran of trench warfare, poet and novelist Robert Graves, to say “good-bye to all that” and emigrate. Interwar Britain was therefore what Professor Harold Perkin called a “halfway house”—a society halfway between Victorian ways, now often malfunctioning, and the ways of the post-World War II world.

THE BRITISH ECONOMY BETWEEN THE WARS

The Great War, as we saw in chapter 23, caused enormous dislocations in the British economy. It used up valuable capital, turned Britain into a debtor nation, eroded Britain’s ability to earn income from invisible exports, disrupted world trade patterns, and caused some industries to be neglected. Clearly, the United States had replaced Britain as the world’s great economic power. Because the British economy was so heavily dependent on world

¹E. L. Woodward, *Short Journey* (London: Faber and Faber, 1942), 122.

trade, which had been so radically disrupted by the war, the outlook for British recovery in 1920 was very bleak.

The British economy in the 1920s thus had to operate in world conditions over which Britain had little control. During the war years, the United States and Japan had expanded their production enormously and taken over former British markets in Latin America, Asia, and even India. Dominions such as Canada and Australia had increased their own industrial output and thereby reduced the market share for British manufactures. The web of war debts and reparations skewed international trade. Moreover, most of the British export industries produced goods such as textiles and coal in which Britain faced new, more technologically advanced overseas competition. Furthermore, these goods were to suffer a declining share of the world's markets because of new products such as synthetic fabrics and petroleum. Finally, during the war, nations that had supplied primary products (foodstuffs and raw materials) had greatly increased their production, causing the price of primary products to fall. This situation benefited Britain as an importer of primary products, but it also created problems for British exports because it reduced the ability of primary producers around the world to buy manufactured articles from Britain.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the British after the Great War needed to move rapidly from wartime production and to shift resources of capital and labor away from the old staple industries (cotton, coal, and iron) into newer industries that would be able to compete in world markets. British politicians and businessmen, however, could not clearly envision such a strategy; they wanted not to engage in rational state planning and direction of the economy (which they associated with wartime), but instead to remove the government as soon as possible from its economic role. This was a legacy of nineteenth-century liberalism. The Lloyd George cabinet did plan to demobilize troops rationally, by releasing workers in key occupations first, but protests and demobilization riots among the troops forced the government to adopt the simple principle of "first in, first out." Many ex-soldiers, including former officers, then found it impossible to obtain work. Their discontent added to the severe labor unrest that already afflicted certain industrial areas such as Clydeside (Scotland) and the coalfield of South Wales. The government also sought to end unpopular wartime controls as rapidly as possible: food rationing ended in 1919, and most of the economic regulations ended within two years. The government was pledged to measures of social reform, but in its basic economic role, it sought to return to normalcy—that is, the noninterventionist state.

The government's policy of withdrawing from the economy seemed to be rewarded by a brief boom in 1919 and 1920. The desire of industries to replace worn-out machinery and to replenish stocks of consumer goods that had been depleted during the war caused this restocking boom. Unfortunately, the postwar boom misled many British industrialists and financiers as to the economic climate and encouraged them to invest in industries in which there was already too much productive capacity. It also encouraged the use of wartime profits for speculative buying and selling of companies, and like most bouts of company mergers, this one of the early 1920s left many firms with a massive burden of debt. When trade inevitably began to contract in 1921, these companies were forced either to cut wages, which caused serious problems in industrial relations, or to go out of business.

Britain thus slid into a depression in 1921, which though it had better and worse moments, lasted through the 1930s. The slump beginning in 1921 held on for most of the 1920s, and the economy was just beginning to emerge from it when the blizzard of worldwide depression struck in 1929. The worst years were those from 1929 until 1932. A gradual recovery from that trough followed until 1937, when another downturn ensued, with yet another recovery only beginning when war broke out again in 1939. The economy overall continued to grow at a rate of about 2 percent a year, but the old staple industries suffered a major setback and, for the first time since the Industrial Revolution, contracted. Coal fell from its production peak of 287 million tons in 1913 to 227 million tons in 1938—a 21-percent decrease. Cotton textiles fell from 8 billion square yards to 3 billion—a 63-percent decrease. Shipbuilding dropped 69 percent between 1913 and 1938. Exports fell by 13 percent, and the imbalance between visible exports and imports worsened sharply, even as invisible earnings from overseas finance, brokerage, and investments declined. In the early 1930s, Britain suffered for the first time in the modern period (but not the last) a deficit in the balance of payments, and even a run on gold and foreign currency reserves in the Bank of England (that is, foreign holders of pounds turned in huge amounts of them for gold and other currencies). Worst of all, the rate of unemployment was at least 10 percent every year between 1923 and 1939; in 1932, the worst year in these bleak times, it reached 22.5 percent.

The long-term depression in the old staple industries represented the decline of the manufactures that had made Victorian Britain great. Whole geographical regions that had once been the scene of belching smokestacks and clanging factories now stood idle: South Wales, central and southeastern Scotland, the Belfast area of Northern Ireland, northeastern England,

Cumberland, and parts of Lancashire. In South Wales, many mining towns had more than two-thirds of the work force unemployed. The shipbuilding town of Jarrow in Durham had an unemployment rate of *80 percent* in the early 1930s. In the worst period, 1931–32, 35 percent of British coal miners, 36 percent of pottery workers, 43 percent of cotton operatives, and 62 percent of ship builders were out of work. Novelist J. B. Priestley in 1933 found the industrial areas a dismal picture:

. . . the industrial England of coal, iron, steel, cotton, wool, railways; of thousands of rows of little houses, all alike, sham Gothic churches, square-faced chapels, Town Halls, Mechanics' Institutes, mills, foundries, warehouses . . . railway stations, slag-heaps and 'tips,' dock roads . . . cindery waste ground, mill chimneys, slums, fried-fish shops, public houses with red blinds . . . a cynically devastated countryside, sooty dismal little towns, and sootier grim fortress-like cities. This England makes up the larger part of the Midlands and the North and exists everywhere; but it is not being added to and has no new life poured into it.

Could the decay of Britain's staple industries have been avoided in the 1920s and 1930s? Probably not, for the roots of decline in these industries lay partly, as we have seen, in patterns of trade and investment of the late nineteenth century; partly in the maturing of other industrial economies; and partly in the peculiar problems of the world economy after the Great War. But British policy makers aggravated the difficulties. In 1925, for instance, the government decided to return to the gold standard at the pre-war parity of \$4.86 to the pound sterling in an effort to shore up Britain's position in international finance. This measure overpriced British goods by 10 percent and thus made them less competitive in world markets. Britain went off the gold standard in 1932 to avoid a run on the pound and depletion of the Bank of England's gold reserves, but by then the damage to Britain's trade position had been done. Moreover, orthodox economic theory, adhered to by almost all politicians, bankers, and academic economists during the interwar years, held (1) that the free market system was self-regulating; (2) that it would automatically adjust interest rates to maximize investment and production and thus bring about full employment; and (3) that the government must not intervene in the economy for fear of diverting capital, goods, and labor from "natural" rates of interest, prices, and wages. In Britain, this theory remained dominant until near the end of the thirties.

If the policy makers had listened to John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946), the brilliant Cambridge economist and member of the Bloomsbury Group, they might have concluded that the government should take responsibility for stimulating economic activity and increasing aggregate demand. In his pathbreaking work, *The General Theory of Employment,*

Interest, and Money, Keynes contended that, although market economies are self-regulating, they may reach equilibrium at low rates of investment and demand and a high rate of unemployment. In Britain's depression of the 1930s, the demand for goods was so low that industrialists had no incentive to borrow money from banks to expand production; instead, they cut production and wages. Keynes asserted that, if the government pumped money into the economy (by investing in public works and by running a deficit), demand would be stimulated. As a result, businessmen would seek to invest in new factories and hire more workers. Wages would rise, and the demand for consumer goods would spiral upward. Thus deliberate *demand management* by the government could jolt the economy out of the doldrums. By such policies alone, Keynes believed, capitalism could be saved from fascism or communism. But Keynes did not publish his great theoretical work supporting this view, *The General Theory*, until 1936; until then the majority opinion held that he was preaching wasteful and irresponsible policies and therefore that the government could not intervene effectively.

Yet British governments between the wars were not completely inactive in economic policies. All interwar governments regardless of party affiliation sought to maintain the stability of the pound sterling by requiring balanced budgets and retaining (until 1932) the gold standard. By 1932, however, Britain's economic position was so perilous that the National government (as we will see in the next chapter, technically a coalition government, but dominated by the Conservative party) took a dramatic step. The government not only took Britain off the gold standard, but it also abandoned free trade by passing the Import Duties Act and then opening trade negotiations with the dominions to establish a system of imperial tariff preferences. Such action was momentous; free trade had stood as the foundation of British trading policy since 1846. With the tariff, the National government sought to protect British industry from foreign competition within the domestic market, to mark out the Empire as a safe haven for British goods, and to promote the *rationalization* (that is, streamlining) of British industries. As it turned out, the tariff had little effect, but its passage signified the end of one more aspect of the Victorian economic system.

Throughout the 1920s and 30s governments also intervened in the economy by promoting rationalization of industry. Policymakers believed that British industry would fare better in world competition if the smaller, less efficient firms were either eliminated or swallowed up by larger companies. Such a movement, often called *concentration*, was already underway as a result of an impetus from industry itself, as large companies amalgamated

and bought out smaller ones. The formation of giant combines such as Imperial Chemical Industries, Unilever, and Imperial Tobacco Company was typical of the concentration movement of the 1920s. By informal pressure and by parliamentary act, governments of the 1920s and 1930s helped foster such rationalization.

Concentration in the interwar period altered the structure of many industries. The 130 railway companies of 1914 were reduced to four regionally separate and noncompeting firms after 1921. The thirty-eight joint-stock banks were reduced to twelve in 1924, and of those, five dominated the rest. Iron and steel manufacturers entered a huge steel cartel after 1932. The myriad coal companies, long a problem in the mining industry, had been weeded out and joined in cartels by 1936. By 1939, the British economy, once one of the least amalgamated and centralized in the industrial world, had become one of the most highly concentrated, with the one hundred largest companies by 1939 accounting for 26 percent of the nation's manufacturing output.

The development of new industries also advanced the restructuring of British industry during the interwar years. Most of these produced light consumer goods as opposed to the heavy industry of the Victorian period, and most were located in the South and Southeast of England, near the huge consumer market of London, instead of in the old industrial centers of the North and Northwest. Chief among these new industries were electricity, rayon, and automobiles. Because of their early head start in the use of steam and gas power, the British had lagged behind other advanced nations in electrical industries. During the 1920s and 1930s, however, the government's Central Electricity Board made great strides in concentrating the generation of electricity in a few efficient plants and in tying them together in a national grid. These steps made electric power available to people in every region, and by 1938 there were nine million consumers of electricity. The country was flooded with electrical consumer products such as irons, stoves, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, and radios. By 1937, for instance, approximately two million radios a year were sold. Meanwhile, the production of rayon (a cheap artificial fabric) expanded rapidly, at the expense of the cotton and woolen industries, but to the advantage of consumers of inexpensive and lightweight clothing. The automotive industry, benefiting from wartime stimuli and mass-production techniques, rose to second place in the world (behind the United States). The British automotive industry by 1938 produced more than half a million vehicles a year and

employed half a million workers. All of these new industries were part of a vast increase in the nationwide consumer sales industry, with companies such as Woolworth, Marks and Spencer, and Sainsbury opening stores in almost every locality.

How far the new industries were responsible for the overall record of growth in the 1920s and 1930s, and for the record of recovery in the later 1930s, is a matter for debate. Mass production techniques, “scientific” management (based on systematic time and motion studies), and economies of scale certainly made these industries more productive than most older firms, and they paved the way for the future. The new industries, however, did not as yet constitute a majority of the industrial sector of the economy, and the rate of investment in British industry remained comparatively low. Probably the industry most responsible for recovery in the 1930s was construction, for low interest rates (that is, cheap money for loans) encouraged a wave of home building between 1932 and 1937, with a consequent demand for domestic appliances. Toward the end of the 1930s, rearmament, particularly in the aircraft industry, began to have a major effect on the economy. Thus, the recovery, like the products of the new industries themselves, was built around the home market rather than foreign trade. This represented a significant shift in the shape of the British economy.

TRADE UNIONS, CLASS CONFLICT, AND THE GENERAL STRIKE OF 1926

British trade unions emerged from World War I in a strong position, but were thrown on the defensive during the interwar years. The wartime power of organized labor contributed to an increase in militancy over issues such as dilution of the work force by unskilled laborers. The spread of socialism and syndicalism, especially after the Russian Revolution of 1917, further strengthened this militancy. The consequent struggle between workers and employers, which inevitably involved the government, marked the height of the wave of class conflict that had been building since the turn of the century. Strikes reached an unprecedented level in 1917–22. Workers sought to win union recognition, to maintain the high wages they had won during the war, and to raise wages during the brief boom of 1919–20. These strikes were often accompanied by political demands for nationalization of the coal mines, railways, or banks. Once unemployment began to rise, however, the employers went on a counteroffensive. British industry averaged thirty-six million workdays lost to industrial conflict from 1919 through 1923.

The most severe problems were in the coal industry. This old industry was afflicted with a number of long-term problems: the existence of far too many small and inefficient coal companies; low productivity compared to its competitors in other states, due to inadequate investment in new technology and the exhaustion of relatively easily mined coal deposits; and a shrinking share of foreign markets. The government had nationalized the mines during the war, and the miners thought that permanent nationalization would eliminate many of the weaknesses of the industry. The miners also wanted higher wages and shorter hours, whereas the mine owners wanted to retain private ownership and cut wages in order to improve their competitive position.

The ongoing struggle between miners and mine owners precipitated the General Strike of 1926. The strike showed the union movement at the height of its power—and proved that it was not powerful enough. In 1925, foreign competition and the return to the gold standard brought about a crisis in the earnings of the British coal industry. When the mine owners again tried to cut wages and to increase working hours, the miners appealed for help to the Trades Union Congress (TUC). The TUC responded favorably. Emboldened by this support, the miners bargained stubbornly against the equally strong determination of the mine owners. (One government official said he would have thought the miners the stupidest men he had ever met, except that he had recently dealt with the owners.) On May 1, 1926, the owners locked out the miners. The TUC called on many of its unions to come out in support of the miners.

The rate of support for this general strike was very high: some 2.5 million workers struck. But this high union morale and solidarity lasted little more than a week. The TUC had failed to make careful plans for a general



The General Strike of 1926: Armored cars and troops guard a food convoy in London.

strike. In contrast, the Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin *had* made plans; it used middle- and upper-class volunteers, including public school boys and Oxbridge undergraduates, to continue essential supplies and services, and it mobilized troops, warships, and auxiliary policemen. Such resolute policies backed the TUC into a corner. It was not a revolutionary organization and in no way wished to foment a revolution. Faced with the government's refusal to negotiate while the strike continued, the leaders of the TUC caved in and called off the strike after nine days. The miners, feeling betrayed, remained locked out until the winter, when they too capitulated.

The unions' defeat in the General Strike contributed to a decline in union membership and morale, which accelerated with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. The unions lost ground while trying to defend wages, working conditions, and their own legal status. In 1931, the low point of union membership, the unions included only about 25 percent of the work force. Union membership had stood at over 8 million in 1920, but fell to 4.4 million in 1933, recovering only to 6.3 million in 1939.

At the same time, a gap appeared between the official union leadership and the unions' rank and file members. In the years after the strike, the unions undertook some amalgamation, and the number of unions fell from over 1,200 in 1914 to about 780 in 1945. This development increased the degree of bureaucratization within the unions and therefore widened the separation of union leaders from their membership. Consequently, the official trade unions in the 1930s reached an accommodation with the capitalist system, but their more militant members, led by the shop stewards, often engaged in unofficial (*wildcat*) strike actions. These twin qualities of the organized labor movement—moderation by the official union leadership and militancy by some of the local rank-and-file members continued into the Second World War and postwar periods.

SOCIETY BETWEEN THE WARS

One of the paradoxes of the social history of interwar Britain is that the standard of living for many people—although emphatically not the unemployed—continued to improve despite long-term economic depression. A visible index of the improved standard of living was the fact that shoeless, ragged children were now rarely seen. The main reason for the improvement of the material conditions of life for the employed population was that wages as well as salaries remained level after the sharp increase of the war years, while prices fell markedly. The cost of living declined by more than 20

percent between 1920 and 1938. This growth in real income enabled people to spend more for food and clothing. One estimate holds that per capita food consumption improved by more than 30 percent in the interwar years.

Significant improvements in education and some redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor through governmental taxation and social services also contributed to improved standards of living. The spirit of social improvement generated by the war effort produced the Fisher Education Act of 1918, which at long last made free, compulsory education until age fourteen universal. The depression and consequent governmental concern with budgetary economy prevented full realization of the Fisher Act; nevertheless, public spending on education increased by 65 percent between 1920 and 1939, and by 1938 more than two-thirds of all children between eleven and fourteen years of age were in secondary schools.

The extension of state education after 1919 was not done for purposes of deliberate social engineering, but for simple social justice. The same can be said of the state's transfer of incomes from rich to poor. Graduated taxes, including both death duties and income taxes, remained relatively high after the First World War. Whereas the wealthiest people in Britain had paid income taxes at only an 8-percent rate in 1913, they paid at 42.5 percent in 1919 and 39.1 percent in 1938. Meanwhile, social benefits to the poor, including unemployment payments, old age pensions, medical insurance, and school medical treatments, grew from 4.2 percent of the gross national product in 1910 to 11.3 percent in 1938. By the time World War II broke out, Britain had the most extensive welfare benefits of any state in western Europe. For the first time, the British working class collected more in social benefits from the state than they paid in taxes: by 1926, for instance, they enjoyed a net payback of 21 percent.

As a result of these changes, the gap between rich and poor narrowed during the interwar years. Whereas social investigators such as Booth and Rowntree in the late nineteenth century had found that 30 percent of the population lived at or below the poverty level, similar surveys between the wars (including some done by Rowntree himself) found that the number of impoverished had been reduced to 10 to 15 percent of the people—even though the standard definition of poverty had been broadened from the inability to maintain physical efficiency to the inability to satisfy a wide range of human needs, including more food, clothing, housing, heating, lighting, and the occasional treat.

Britain remained, however, a severely class-ridden society, not least in its educational system. Education beyond age fourteen remained woefully

rare for the working class. The middle and upper classes continued to fill up the fee-paid grammar schools (that is, college preparatory high schools) and the public schools (that is, expensive private boarding schools). Although a number of provincial university colleges were added to the collection of red-brick universities, the British higher education system remained seriously underfunded and undersized. In 1938, only 2 percent of British nineteen-year-olds were enrolled in colleges and universities, and less than one-fourth of these were women.

Highly unequal incomes—but not as unequal as in the previous century—continued to characterize British society. A tiny minority of some two thousand families enjoyed average annual incomes of more than £40,000, whereas 88 percent of the population earned less than £250 a year. In between stood the middle and upper classes, who enjoyed between £650 and £10,000 a year. Doctors and barristers earned over £1,000 a year, and the rapidly growing class of professional managers of industry even more, whereas coal miners earned less than £150 and agricultural laborers, as ever the worst-paid group, less than £100. Still, the income pyramid thickened in its middle and bottom layers. In 1913, for example, the richest 10 percent of the population enjoyed 50 percent of the national income, but in 1938 the richest 10 percent took only 41 percent.

One of the main reasons that working-class incomes went further between the wars was that they were typically spread over fewer people. The practice of family limitation that had begun with the middle and upper classes in the 1870s had extended to the working class by the 1920s. Despite a decline in the death rate, therefore, a decreasing birth rate slowed the growth of the British population to less than one-half percent a year. (Scotland, Ireland, and Wales grew even more slowly than England, with the result that the British population increasingly resided in England.) The average number of children per family fell from 3.4 in 1911 to 2.2 in 1931. As the number of large families decreased, the average wage-earner's pay packet had to support fewer people.

The desire of working people for a better standard of living underlay the practice of family limitation. The methods employed were numerous. Although the average age at marriage did not increase, by the 1930s two-thirds of married couples in Britain were using some form of birth control: abstinence, the safe period, coitus interruptus, diaphragms, and above all, condoms. Information about contraceptives became much more widely available, as social reformers who were concerned about the impoverishing effect of large families published cheap books and pamphlets and established

a birth control movement. A more liberal attitude toward sex accompanied the information and technology of birth control. Dr. Marie Stopes, for example, published in 1918 two books (*Married Love* and *Wise Parenthood*) that together advocated sexual fulfillment in marriage as well as family planning. In 1930, she helped found the National Birth Control Association, which became the Family Planning Association in 1939; it established clinics in most of the large cities.

Women in general benefited from improved family income, family limitation, and the abandonment of many prewar restrictions and inhibitions. Lighter clothes, shorter hemlines, and even shorts for sporting activities such as tennis and hiking replaced the more formal and cumbersome Victorian fashions and pointed to greater freedom for women. As we have seen, the vote was granted to women over age thirty in 1918 and to all women in 1928. In addition, the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 eliminated the legal prohibition of women from the legal profession; the first woman member of Parliament (MP), Nancy Astor, took her seat in the House of Commons in 1919; the first woman justice of the peace (JP) was appointed in 1920; women's rights in divorce were made equal to men's in 1923; and women won the right to hold and dispose of property on an equal basis with men in 1926.

These gains did not, however, mean any sort of radical change in gender roles or relationships. Women continued to earn far less than men and married women in particular found employment opportunities limited. The trauma of the war led to a renewed emphasis on women's domesticity, based on the idea that a woman's primary identity was that of a wife and mother.

This domestic emphasis contributed to a split in mainstream feminism between those who accepted the renewed domesticity and thus concentrated on improving maternal welfare, and those who continued to reject the *separate spheres* ideology and to fight for the expansion of women's employment and educational opportunities. The Fabian Women's Group fell into the first group; it campaigned for family allowances and a greater degree of economic independence for wives and mothers. In a very different way, the Women's League of Health and Beauty reinforced women's domestic roles by promoting female physical welfare and athleticism, hence improving women's reproductive outcomes. Not all feminist groups belonged entirely to one camp or the other, however. The principal feminist organization of the time, the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizen-

ship (NUSEC), campaigned for reforms such as family allowances and free birth control information that would improve the condition of life for women in the home, but it also advocated abolition of the marriage bar to work in the civil service. Cooperative guilds and women's institutes gave women the opportunity to strengthen their administrative skills and to learn about topics ranging from birth control and charitable activities to international politics.

For all the improvement in material standards of living, the most dramatic and memorable aspect of social life between the wars was unemployment. The unemployment rate averaged 10.6 percent in the 1920s and 16.1 percent in the 1930s. Its effect on communities in the old industrial areas was devastating and became engraved on the minds of the British working people. It was regional in its impact—the South and Southeast suffered relatively little, whereas the North of England, the Scottish Lowlands, Wales, and Northern Ireland were hit hard—and it affected men over age forty-five, who found it nearly impossible to get new jobs, more than younger ones. J. B. Priestley observed that in hard-hit towns such as Jarrow, thousands of workers seemed to spend their time just hanging around; the men, he wrote, “wore the drawn masks of prisoners of war.” The coal miners, who formerly had been fairly well paid and were accustomed to prodigious labor, were perhaps the worst off, with their unemployment rate running 20 percent in the best years of the period and 40 percent in the worst. They found it miserable to be regarded as ineffectual or as layabouts; as one said,

To men who had worked in the only industry they had known for anything from fifteen to fifty years, this was a new experience, of the most humiliating and degrading kind.

Yet the simmering discontent among the unemployed did not boil over into effective political action. The trade union movement was not organized or ideologically equipped to mobilize the jobless. The National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM), founded in 1921, did endeavor to give voice to the interests of the unemployed through demonstrations and hunger marches, but it was never able to organize more than 10 percent of the jobless. The NUWM's ties to communism frightened some workers; apathy and fatalistic resignation probably played a bigger role. The most memorable of the hunger marches of the interwar years, a three-hundred-mile march by two hundred men from Jarrow to London, was not an NUWM project. Though it stirred public emotion, the Jarrow workers' march accomplished nothing—except to get the marchers' unemployment allowances docked.



Unemployment in the 1930s: *Hunger marchers from Jarrow on the way to London.*

Unemployment allowances became known as *the dole*; the *means test* by which the jobless had to qualify for the dole became the aspect of unemployment they despised the most. Most British workers were covered by the unemployment insurance system introduced by Lloyd George in 1911 and expanded in subsequent years. Through it a worker earned unemployment payments for a maximum of fifteen weeks—but many thousands of workers soon exceeded the fifteen weeks, through no fault of their own. They were then thrown on the meager mercies of the Poor Law.

The Poor Law system simply could not cope with the vast numbers of people thrown out of work by the Great Depression. In 1930, then, the whole Poor Law structure was abolished. Instead, the long-term unemployed received “transitional” benefits, or the dole. To receive these benefits, an applicant had to prove he was “actively seeking work” and to endure the humiliation of the means test, which proved that the family was sufficiently impoverished to warrant the allowance. The means test required the unemployed person to submit to investigation of his house and home by prying officials, who wanted to know why certain pieces of furniture had not been sold, or how much money the family had in savings, or how much the chil-

dren were contributing to the family income. In some cases, young people had to move out of the family home in order to prevent their own earnings from penalizing their parents; in many other cases, elderly relatives were forced to move to lodgings so that their old age pensions did not disqualify the family for the dole. The means test understandably caused extremely hard feelings among the British working class—a legacy of bitterness that would affect post–World War II policies.

POPULAR CULTURE

Popular culture between the wars in Britain presents two strikingly different pictures: first, the misery and frustration of life on the dole for the unemployed; second, the consumerism of mass culture that grew from the improved standards of living and smaller families of the employed.

As many contemporaries observed, it was possible for the unemployed to lose all ambition and to accustom themselves to living on the dole. But as documentary writers such as George Orwell (in *The Road to Wigan Pier*) and Walter Greenwood (in *Love on the Dole*) reported, it was never easy. Life on the dole included living in overcrowded and squalid housing, wearing shabby clothes, searching daily for work, scrimping on twenty shillings a week, making miserable economies, gambling on horses or football pools in hopes of quick financial relief, and facing the inquisitorial Public Assistance Committee that oversaw the means test. There was not enough to eat, and people dropped from their diet expensive items such as meat, vegetables, and dairy products, replacing them with “fillers” such as potatoes, bread, margarine, and jam. A Sunday newspaper, an occasional movie, or a few hours at the pub were the only recreations. In some families, the long period of unemployment destroyed self-respect and pride in cleanliness and personal appearance. Young people in disturbing numbers turned to crime. But other families made heroic efforts to sustain the appearance of respectability. Some men stood every day in endless queues at the factory gates hoping for work. The Pilgrim Trust found that women were starving themselves “in order to feed and clothe the children reasonably well.”

In sharp contrast, for those who enjoyed regular employment, the rise in real incomes meant better homes, less burdensome work, and the enjoyment of mass leisure activities of a kind once reserved to the rich. Slum clearance and house construction made significant advances between the wars. Toward the end of the war, Lloyd George’s government pledged itself to “homes fit for heroes,” and the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919 and subsequent

legislation helped local authorities build nearly two million houses for rent at subsidized rates to working people. Many of the new houses built by local authorities were constructed on housing estates outside the cities, such as Becontree, at Dagenham (outside London), and Kirkby, outside Liverpool. Nearly 20 percent of the working class was relocated to such *council housing*. Although some critics feared that these new housing estates would destroy the community spirit of the old working-class neighborhoods, in fact the inhabitants quickly established vigorous communities in their new environs. The new council housing offered much improved space, privacy, light, heat, water, and sewerage, and tenants on the whole preferred them to their former slum housing. The rise in living standards for the employed working and lower middle class also stimulated a private housing boom, with builders in the 1930s adding 2.5 million houses for the private housing market.

New consumer-oriented leisure activities came to take up a larger share of working-class time and income. As the average size of the British household declined, each family needed to spend less on necessities and had more to spend on leisure activities. Moreover, working people had more leisure time. The average work week fell from fifty-four hours to forty-eight, and the *weekend* (half a day free on Saturday and all day on Sunday) became the national norm. The number of holidays also increased. Legislation passed in 1871 had extended and rearranged the holiday calendar from the Victorian practice of allowing only four holidays a year. Between the wars, the custom of giving employees extended summer holidays (vacations) with pay became established. By 1937, about three million workers enjoyed paid vacations, and in 1938 the Holidays with Pay Act extended the privilege to eleven million more.

More leisure time and more money to spend generated consumer demand for a va-riety of leisure activities. Working people read more books, magazines, and newspapers than ever before, but they also took an interest in dance halls, gambling, movies, gardening, pigeon keeping, and professional sports (mainly football—that is, soccer). The growth of holidays caused a boom in the holiday resort business. As early as the 1880s, better-off members of the working class were visiting seaside resorts such as Blackpool, Southend, and Margate. By the late 1930s, such resorts received more than twenty million tourists a year, most of whom came by train and special motor buses. Probably about one-third of the population spent a holiday away from home each year. The resorts and campgrounds spun off many commercial activities to entertain the visitors: swimming pools, fairgrounds, hotels, pleasure piers, dance halls, and cinemas.



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Interwar prosperity: *For those who were employed, the era of the Great Depression was actually a time of rising income, growing consumerism, and expanded opportunities for leisure. Affordable vacations at Butlins Holiday Camps proved a roaring success.*

The principal new leisure-time activities of the interwar years sprang from new technologies: the cinema, radio, and automobile. Moviegoing had become popular before the First World War; indeed, the wartime Ministry for Information used films for propaganda purposes. After the war, films became wildly popular, especially when *talkies* were introduced in 1927. By 1939, there were almost five thousand cinema houses in Britain, and cinemas rivaled dance halls and pubs as the main forms of popular entertainment. By then, some twenty million tickets a week were being sold, and it has been estimated that in some towns 40 percent of the population went to a cinema at least once a week.

Radio was another Edwardian invention that received a major impetus from the war. The first regular programs were broadcast in 1922, and as sets became cheaper and more reliable, the number of licenses issued to private owners grew to more than eight million by the 1930s. By 1939, about three-fourths of all British households had access to radios. In 1926, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was established as a public corporation,

with control over all broadcasting in Britain. Its first director-general, John Reith, committed the BBC to a policy of instruction as well as entertainment. "The preservation of a high moral tone," Reith declared, "is obviously of paramount importance." Otherwise, he said, Britain would have no more than the American system, with "no co-ordination, no standard, no guiding policy." Consequently, the BBC offered a heavy (and as many said, humorless) diet of classical music, intellectual talks, serious drama, and news. Reith insisted on a non-regional, standard upper-class BBC diction and pronunciation, as well as a big dose of religious programming. Reith's high moral tone proved a bit too high, however: throughout the 1930s, the proportion of programming time that the BBC allotted to dance music, celebrity interviews, and sporting events steadily expanded in response to public demand.

Neither the films nor the BBC could rival newspapers in mass communication and in molding popular taste and opinion. Newspapers for the masses in Britain had their origins in the late-Victorian years, when the new state school system began to eliminate illiteracy. By the 1920s, most of the adult population was literate, although perhaps 20 percent must be regarded as only semiliterate and not able to follow a sustained argument or story. Given this level of literacy and the availability of spendable incomes, newspaper circulation grew rapidly. By 1939, almost 70 percent of the British people over sixteen read a daily national newspaper. Run as giant business enterprises, the newspapers engaged in ferocious commercial rivalry. As in business generally, concentration took place in the newspaper industry, and increasingly the popular newspapers were gathered into the hands of a few press barons and combines. The most famous press barons of the era, Lord Rothermere (Harold Harmsworth) and Lord Beaverbrook (Max Aitken), were both fiercely ambitious and not shy about exercising their power in politics. The papers with the largest circulation, the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Herald*, each sold more than two million copies a day, whereas the so-called quality press, such as the *Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*, had circulations of far below a million. The style of the *popular press*, shaped by the simple desire to sell newspapers, ran to large headlines, eye-catching layouts, numerous photographs, short news stories, cartoon strips, crossword puzzles, advertisements, and games.

As for automobiles, the British motor vehicle industry grew rapidly between the wars, but motoring remained largely a middle-class activity. Car ownership grew from about one hundred thousand in 1919 to two million in 1939. By the early 1930s, mass production techniques had driven down the

price of a small Austin or Morris to between £100 and £200, which put them in the reach of most middle-class incomes, but out of reach of all but the best-paid skilled workers in the working class. For the middle class, motor-ing became an immensely popular activity. Major highways (motorways) proliferated, and repair garages, filling stations, and roadside cafes sprang up to cater to the newly mobile motoring public. By the 1930s, parts of England suffered from Sunday afternoon traffic jams. For writer J. B. Priestley, this represented the “new post-war England,” a world of “arterial and by-pass roads, of filling stations and factories that look like exhibition buildings, of giant cinemas and dance-halls and cafes, bungalows with tiny garages”—a far cry from the depressed and decaying industrial areas in the North.

Popular culture between the wars was also notable for the contraction of two once important aspects of ordinary life: drink and religion. The consumption of alcohol fell off sharply during the war, largely because of higher taxes on liquor and beer and shorter hours during which pubs could be open. Drinking never recovered during the interwar years. To be sure, the pub was still a key feature of working-class communities, and respectable women now frequented them regularly, but men tended to spend more time at home with their families. Thus, whereas two vices, gambling and smoking, grew rapidly between the wars, drinking declined. One estimate is that expenditure on drink fell by more than 33 percent between 1919 and 1939, and the annual production of beer in the 1930s reached only half of the prewar level.

At the same time, but for rather different reasons, the numbers of churchgoers in Britain decreased during the 1930s. Roman Catholicism alone among the Christian denominations continued to grow because its prominent role in Irish immigrant neighborhoods enabled it to hold the allegiance of its young people. The Protestant churches exerted themselves to reverse their decline in the 1920s and managed to increase their membership to a record level (in absolute numbers) of nearly six million in 1927. Thereafter, the increase in spendable income for employed workers, the growing participation in consumerism and material pleasures, and the competition from other leisure time activities drew people away from the Protestant churches, particularly Nonconformity. In 1941, fewer than five million Britons were active members of the Protestant denominations. Secularization—the removal of activities or ideas from the orbit of religion—was a main trend in popular culture.

Yet Britain was not yet a secular society. As already noted, religious programming constituted a large part of the BBC's output, and BBC surveys showed that most of these programs' listeners were not churchgoers. The

new technology was thus allowing religious expression in new forms. In the state schools, too, prayers, worship services, and religious instruction classes were part of the daily routine. Most working-class people retained a belief in God and the fundamentals of the Christian faith, sent their children to Sunday school, enjoyed singing hymns, and attended church to mark the major rites of passage (birth, marriage, and death) and to celebrate important holidays. In Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, the ties between cultural and religious identity remained strong. In England, Nonconformity's decline enabled the Church of England to reclaim its role as the national church, a symbol of Englishness.

HIGH CULTURE

We saw in the last chapter that the war, particularly the absurd tragedy of trench warfare, shattered many prewar ideals and assumptions and engendered a sense of cultural crisis. Postwar developments such as the expansion of consumerism and the appearance of mass commercialized culture confirmed the sense of crisis among highbrow intellectuals. For example, many intellectuals recoiled from the mass press and the new movie industry. This commercialized culture, they argued, destroyed genuine popular culture—that is, culture that sprang from the authentic beliefs and day-to-day life of the people. Critics saw the new consumer culture as soulless; it taught uniformity but not community by homogenizing people into an undifferentiated materialistic mass.

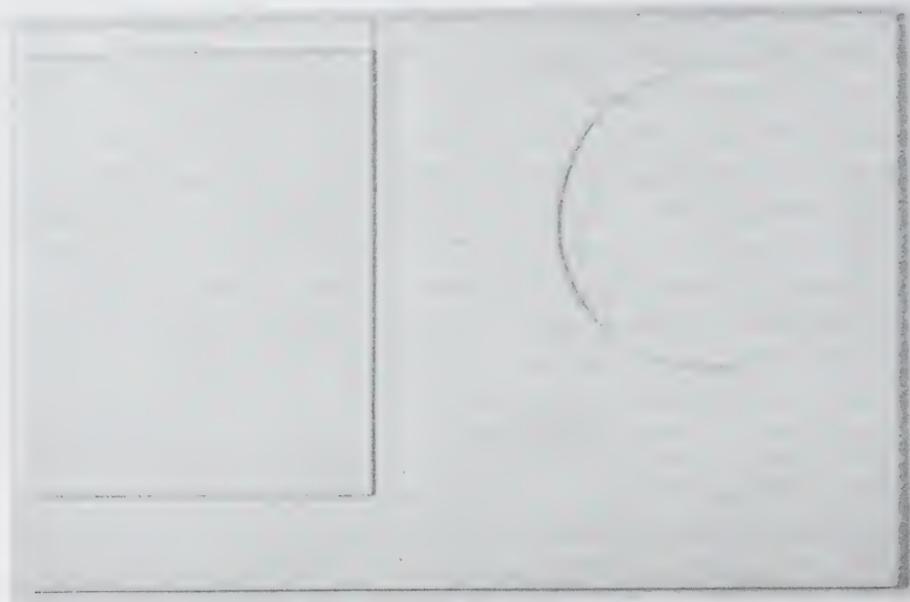
This sense of crisis accelerated the triumph of modernism in high culture. Modernism, as we saw in chapter 19, originated in the aesthetic and decadent movements of the late-Victorian and Edwardian years, but it reached full flower in the 1920s and dominated much of cultural and intellectual production through the 1950s. Essentially, modernism repudiated Victorian ideals and literary conventions. Modernists insisted that art, the highest activity in human life, should not be bound by any requirement to be instructive or morally uplifting. Modernism was self-consciously new, devoted to experimentation and novelty in form and style. Modernists taught that a work of art must be regarded as autonomous (independent) from society, and even from the life of the artist who produced it. Aestheticism, novelty, and autonomy were modernist qualities that, when combined with the modernists' ironic disapproval of the conditions of society and culture, made for very difficult and inaccessible poetry and fiction. It was the

work of an alienated literary elite, most of whom thought that civilization was fragmenting and declining.

The best monument of this turn of mind was T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). Eliot (1888–1965), an émigré from America, had not fought in the war and insisted that his poem concerned his own private experiences of despair and impotence. Nevertheless, *The Waste Land*, with its haunting lines echoing the legendary quest for the holy grail in a sterile and squalid world, seized the imagination of many of the young men and women to whom the war meant not only the creation of wasted landscapes, but also the futility of Western civilization:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats. . . .

Yet the alienation of Britain's postwar intellectual and cultural elite can be overstated. Eliot himself found a basis for a more positive outlook when he reconverted to Christi-anity in 1927; thereafter, he declared himself "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion." Other cultural producers sought to overcome the gap between mass and high culture. From the late 1920s through the 1940s, for example, filmmaker John Grierson (1898–1972) and his documentary film movement endeavored to show the potential of film for depicting ordinary working people in their actual lives. And in the 1930s, an increasing number of intellectuals and artists sought to use their art to address political issues as British modernism took a turn to the left. A younger generation of writers, who were born in the years between 1900 and 1914 and who came of age in the 1920s, rose to prominence. This so-called Auden generation, named after the poet W. H. Auden (1907–73), grew up under the influence of *The Waste Land* and the doctrines of modernism. They believed that Britain was in crisis, but they also believed that it was the obligation of the writer to respond to the crisis with socially responsible art. Efforts to resolve that dilemma formed the main theme of their writing. Most members of this so-called Auden generation were at the time socialists or communists, but their writings were not usually ideological. Poetry, Auden wrote in 1935, "is not concerned with telling people what to do, but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity for action more urgent and its nature more clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible for us to make a rational and moral choice."



Ben Nicholson, White Relief (1935). In stripping his visual works down to the bare minimum, Nicholson carried the modernist abstraction to its logical conclusion.

The visual arts in Britain expressed both the modernist commitment to formalism and a resurgent interest in more figurative and narrative painting. The formalist theme can be seen in the works of the St. Ives' School, centering on painter Ben Nicholson (1894–1982) and his wife, sculptor Barbara Hepworth (1903–75), and drawing its name from the idyllic seaside town of St. Ives in Cornwall, where these abstract artists gathered during the 1930s. Strongly influenced by Dutch painter Piet Mondrian and his starkly geometric and non-representational style, as well as by Pablo Picasso's cubism, Nicholson in many of his works so stripped art down to the very essentials of form that form itself seemed to disappear. In contrast, clearly recognizable individuals crowd the canvases of Nicholson's contemporary and fellow Slade School of Art student Stanley Spencer (1891–1959). Much of Spencer's work illustrated both his Christian commitment and his love of Cookham, the village where he lived most of his life. By placing modernist renditions of Biblical stories in the setting of this very English village along the Thames, Spencer aimed to shock and challenge his viewers to see both Christianity and England in new ways.

In architecture, an art form of necessity more closely tied to the tastes of the public, the vast majority of buildings continued to be designed in the traditional classical, Gothic, or mock-Tudor styles. But modernism made



Stanley Spencer, Christ's Entry into Jerusalem (1920). By setting his religious paintings in his home town of Cookham in southern England, Spencer sought to evoke the holiness in everyday life.

some headway in the Art Deco style and in a few examples of the international style. The clean lines, the geometric formalism, and the decorative use of modern materials such as chrome and plastic appeared in buildings including the cinemas of the Odeon chain, the Hoover factory at Perivale, and a number of London Underground stations. The so-called modern or international style, borrowed from Continental innovators such as Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer, was more severely geometrical even than Art Deco. The modern style was aggressively antihistorical, devoid of ornamentation, convinced of the beauty of machines, and strongly influenced by cubism. It resulted in a number of boxlike, white, concrete, flat-roofed houses and school buildings, the forerunners of the post–World War II steel and glass functional architecture.

The modern style in architecture shows the ambivalence of the British modernist movement as a whole toward science and technology. Many modernist painters and architects were inspired by the orderliness of scientific logic and of modern technology. British philosophers such as



Art deco: The Hoover building, Perivale, London, 1932. Modernism in architecture emphasized clean, geometric lines and functionalist design.

Bertrand Russell, the transplanted Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), and A. J. Ayer (1910–89) provided the philosophical underpinnings of modernism. They admired natural science, and their highly abstract logical positivism saw the function of philosophy as simply the clarification of the logic of science. Yet many literary modernists stood in reaction against science and technology, which they believed to have an increasingly important role in creating a society devoid of values and inhospitable to art.

Science, moreover, had risen in importance in British culture at the same time as serious literature seemed to be retiring to the periphery. The war of 1914–18 was the first major conflict dominated by industrial technology. The British government at long last recognized the importance of scientific research to the national interest. In 1916, the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) was set up to fund research projects. Similarly, the Medical Research Committee, founded in 1913, expanded rapidly in order to meet wartime demands in clinical medicine. Although government funding for science contracted after the war, direct government grants continued to be of considerable consequence, for instance, in the development of radar in the 1930s. *Big science* had come to stay. Meanwhile, British universities, and especially Cambridge, now thoroughly professionalized and specialized, took a leading role in scientific research. Under the

leadership of Ernest Rutherford, Cambridge's Cavendish Laboratory became a hotbed of discoveries in nuclear physics. Similarly, large British corporations in the electrical, chemical, and aircraft industries were beginning to establish laboratories and conduct their own research. In the nineteenth century, science had become professionalized; now it claimed a major share of society's resources.

Finally, the decades between the wars witnessed the continuation of a remarkable renaissance of British music. During the nineteenth century, Britain had produced few significant composers, but in the 1890s, Sir Edward Elgar (1857–1934) began receiving critical acclaim as well as popular applause for romantic compositions deeply rooted in English national tradition and sentiment. His “Pomp and Circumstance Marches,” a series of five compositions written between 1901 and 1930, captured both the triumphalism and the underlying anxiety of British national identity during these years. The central section of the first “Pomp and Circumstance March” serves as the tune for “Land of Hope and Glory,” which remains one of the most popular songs in England, often sung at sporting events. (It also serves as the processional in most American graduation ceremonies.). In the 1920s and 1930s, Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) and Benjamin Britten (1913–76) took British music in new directions, but as with Elgar, they continued to look to Britain's history for inspiration and to create compositions capable of appealing to a wide audience. Vaughan Williams's music drew on English folksongs, hymns, and literature. Britten would not achieve his most important successes until the 1940s and after, but already in the 1930s, he began to compose works in the British choral tradition that reached back to the eighteenth century.

As these three composers show, British music did not follow Continental rhythms. Whereas the leading Continental composers (Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Webern, and Bartók) were engaged in radical experiments in musical forms, rhythms, and tonal relations, the British were more traditional and often built on romantic themes, and this enabled them to retain contact with a broad public. At the same time, eminent conductors such as Thomas Beecham (1879–1961) and Malcolm Sargent (1895–1967), new orchestras such as the London Philharmonic, and most importantly, the BBC, helped to develop a wide national audience for classical music. Thus, while modernism was turning literature and painting inward toward an artistic elite, British music was sinking roots deep in the general public—a hopeful development in a time of difficulties and despair.

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Chapter 26

Politics, Power, and the Coming of War, 1919–1939

In both domestic politics and foreign affairs, the 1920s and 1930s seem to be decades of lost opportunities for Britain. The once great industrial giant staggered through twenty years of depression and unemployment, its resources stretched beyond their limit by overseas commitments, and finally let the triumph of 1918 slip away as war with Germany broke out again. Historian Charles Loch Mowat wrote that British politicians and statesmen between the wars were “pygmies” compared to the “giants” of the Edwardian and war years. There is some truth to this negative assessment, for in many instances, British political leaders dithered and delayed, trying to muddle through times demanding urgent action. They showed little understanding of the tasks before the nation and seemed to blind themselves to pressing realities. Yet such an assessment seems far too harsh. The economic, political, and international problems confronting the British were of unprecedented scale; nevertheless, Britain came through them with its constitution and rule of law intact, with important advances in converting the Empire to a commonwealth, and with the social and intellectual foundations of the welfare state firmly established.

Interwar Domestic Politics and Foreign Affairs

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1918 | Bolshevik Revolution in Russia; armistice ends World War I;
Coupon Election: Lloyd George forms Conservative-Liberal coalition |
| 1919 | Treaty of Versailles concluded; onset of restocking boom in British economy; Anglo-Irish War begins; Amritsar massacre in India; Lloyd George government issues Ten-Year Rule; Keynes publishes <i>The Economic Consequences of the Peace</i> |

- 1921 Onset of the Slump—British economic depression
- 1922 Chanak Crisis: fall of Lloyd George; formation of Conservative government under Bonar Law; Irish Free State established
- 1923 Baldwin replaces Bonar Law as Conservative prime minister
- 1924 First Labour government under MacDonald; Dawes Plan extends time period of German reparations payments
- 1925 Formation of Baldwin's second Conservative government; Chamberlain as minister of health oversees expansion of British social welfare programs
- 1926 General Strike
- 1929 Formation of second Labour government under MacDonald; Young Plan reduces German reparations payments; onset of worldwide Great Depression
- 1930 MacDonald government accepts extension of 5:5:3 ratio for navy ships
- 1931 Financial crisis leads to split of Labour party and imposition of the means test; MacDonald heads National Government; Japan invades Manchuria
- 1932 Ottawa Commonwealth Conference; National Government abandons Ten-Year Rule
- 1933 Hitler forms Nazi government in Germany
- 1934 British rearmament begins
- 1935 Formation of Baldwin's third Conservative government; India Act grants responsible government at provincial level
- 1936 Germany reoccupies Rhineland in violation of Versailles Treaty; onset of Spanish Civil War; abdication crisis: George VI replaces Edward VIII
- 1937 Chamberlain succeeds Baldwin as Conservative prime minister
- 1938 Germany annexes Austria; Munich Crisis; Germany annexes Sudetenland
- 1939
- March Germany annexes the rest of Czechoslovakia
- May Pact of Steel between Germany and Italy

August	German-Soviet Nonaggression Treaty
September 1	Germany invades Poland
September 3	Britain declares war on Germany

THE STRUCTURE OF POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

The structures of British government and politics had undergone important changes since the nineteenth century and soon would experience more. Perhaps the most important development was the growth of the size of government and the scope of its operations. The state was scaled back after the Great War, of course, but it never receded to its prewar size. Government expenditures reached 26.1 percent of the gross national product in 1930, more than twice the pre-1914 level. Government employees numbered almost 7 percent of the work force in 1931; the civil service alone employed 376,000 people, more than seven times as many as in 1880. Moreover, since the attempts of the Asquith government between 1908 and 1914 to settle industrial disputes, the state was expected to form one angle of a triangle of negotiation, with the trade unions and the major employers forming the other two. Especially after the General Strike of 1926 (see chapter 25), this informal *corporatism* addressed many problems in industrial relations.

Constitutional arrangements also changed. The power of the House of Lords, limited in 1911, declined further after the war, and from the 1920s on it was very unusual for a cabinet minister to come from the House of Lords. The war had increased the power of the cabinet and of the prime minister within it. The influence of the cabinet over the House of Commons was supreme, and the role of the prime minister was becoming more similar to that of the American president. In 1916, a cabinet secretariat had been established, which for the first time kept minutes of cabinet meetings and coordinated ministerial activities. This increased the efficiency of the executive and the control of the prime minister over his colleagues. After the war, some prime ministers such as Stanley Baldwin sought to reduce the power of the prime minister, but they were in fact unable to do so. Parliament and the country alike expected prime ministers to play a dominant role in national affairs.

Meanwhile, true electoral democracy was achieved by 1930. The electorate was vastly expanded, and the nation was divided into electoral districts of nearly equal size, each returning one representative to the House of Commons. The Reform Act of 1918 increased the electorate from eight

million to twenty-one million, of whom 40 percent were women. The Reform Act of 1928 added nine million more voters, and now 52 percent of the electorate were women. The sheer size of the electorate and legal limitations on the amount of money that could be spent in a campaign put a premium on efficient constituency organization and the work of party volunteers. This situation gave an advantage to the Conservatives and Labourites, for the Conservative party could rely on flocks of middle-class volunteers, and Labour had the trade unions for support.

The Conservative party, once the organ of the landed classes, by the 1920s had become the party of industrial and financial as well as landed property. The drift of well-to-do middle-class people to the Conservatives had accelerated in the early 1900s, when fear of the spread of socialism pushed many businessmen into the Conservative party, which they regarded as the best defense against the anticipated socialist assault on property. But the postwar Conservative party was not monolithic. Conservatives generally were strong imperialists and nationalists, and during the war they had insisted on aggressive pursuit of the war effort, conscription, and unconditional surrender. Some Conservatives, however, came to recognize that not every part of the Empire could be held in defiance of colonial nationalism. Likewise, the Conservatives on the whole believed in classical economics, laissez-faire, low taxation, and as little government as possible. Yet others still believed in state action to promote national efficiency, and many accepted a modern version of the old idea of paternal obligations.

Many Conservatives were fiercely antisocialist and saw in the Labour party the British toehold of Bolshevism. Others, including Conservative prime minister Stanley Baldwin, sought to diminish class conflict while defending the social order. In the 1930s, a number of young Conservatives, including future prime minister Harold Macmillan, took a flexible approach to social welfare and advocated government spending and social services as a cure for Britain's economic woes. Most Conservatives between the wars favored protective tariffs, but a few, including many of the recent converts from the Liberal party, remained staunch free traders. Given these divisions, the strongest Conservative claim was simply that it was the party of safety and good sense.

The Liberals entered the postwar period badly divided: the split in 1916 between Asquith and Lloyd George over the prosecution of the war effort proved to be permanent. Asquith held control of the Liberal organization, but Lloyd George had most of the money, which he had raised as prime min-



A Conservative Party campaign poster from 1929 capitalizes on popular fear of socialism and the Soviet Union.

ister by selling peerages and other honors. The British electoral system (“first past the post”), which provided (and still does) that the winner of the plurality of votes in a constituency got the seat in Parliament, whereas the losers got nothing, worsened the Liberals’ woes. During the early 1920s, Liberals fared worse in seats won than in popular votes received.

The Gladstonian ideals of peace, retrenchment, and reform remained firmly embedded in the Liberal party, but the war had made them seem at least temporarily obsolete. Liberals between the wars in general supported the free enterprise system, but they sought to make it work by using the state for humanitarian social welfare and redistribution of “surplus” wealth. Electorally very ineffective, the Liberals after 1919 were the most intellectually innovative and progressive of the British parties. By 1929, Liberals such as J. M. Keynes were advocating massive government spending on public works and deficit financing as a cure for economic depression and unemployment. Their problem was not in knowing what to do, but in how to win the power to do it.

Whether the Liberals could have remained one of the two major parties after the split between Asquith and Lloyd George in 1916 is still an open question. The party was losing strength from both its left and right flanks before as well as during the war. On the right, businessmen left the Liberal party to join the Conservatives as their grievances were addressed and Britain increasingly became a middle-class nation. On the left, many Liberal progressives shifted to the Labour party after 1918 because they thought that Labour would be the most effective advocate of social reform. Similarly, many Liberal pacifist intellectuals, dismayed by Lloyd George's aggressive approach to foreign policy, retreated to the Labour party, which despite its socialism seemed to be the best defender of Gladstonianism in external affairs. Many Nonconformists, long the backbone of the Liberal party, shifted either to the Conservatives or to Labour as the political fires of Nonconformity flickered out. At the same time, because the southern Irish counties were no longer represented in Parliament, the Liberals lost the eighty or so votes in the House of Commons that the Home Rulers had long supplied. In short, drained of much of its traditional support, and hamstrung by the bitter division between Asquith and Lloyd George, the Liberals competed poorly for the allegiance of both middle-class and working-class voters. This was a recipe for disaster.

The Labour party, as we saw in chapter 23, emerged much strengthened from the war. Its new constitution of 1918 proclaimed the purpose of creating a society based on cooperation rather than competition. Its famous Clause IV promised "to secure for the producers by hand or brain the full fruits of their industry, and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production." In actuality, however, the Labour party advocated only relatively moderate policies and was not an extreme socialist party. The constitution of 1918 made the party executive more dependent than ever on the trade unions, thus limiting the influence of socialist intellectuals. Clause IV, moreover, was written largely to separate the party from the Liberals. In practice, the Labour party favored nationalization of a few industries such as coal and the railways, limited state welfare programs including unemployment and medical insurance, and the principle of a minimum wage. Otherwise, its policies were far less innovative than those of the more progressive Liberals: Labourites advocated free trade and orthodox (that is, balanced budget) governmental finance. The party had no solutions to the problems of industrial decay or unemployment.

Within the Labour party there was a wide range of socialist ideas. One of these was Christian Socialism, best expressed by brilliant historian and social critic R. H. Tawney (1880–1962). Tawney was an upper-class intellectual deeply imbued with a sense of fellowship and social service. His socialist theory derived from applying Christian ethics to a capitalist society. Tawney believed that where capitalism went wrong was in its ethical basis, for it valued acquisitiveness and rewarded property owners more than their services entitled them to. In *The Acquisitive Society* (1920), Tawney argued for the reorganization of society according to professional function: property owners should be rewarded and given power according to performance of social service.

Another brand of socialism prominent between the wars was Guild Socialism, articulated best by historian and theoretician G. D. H. Cole (1889–1959). Guild Socialism was the British version of Continental syndicalism, which advocated rule of, for, and by trade unions, so that the state would wither away. Cole's Guild Socialism, inspired by the medieval guilds, was not as extreme as syndicalism, but it did advocate workers' control of industry through trade unions, direct action strikes, and reduction of the state to the role of a voluntary association of consumers.

Neither Christian Socialism nor Guild Socialism had much to say about practical reform, for they looked to the general transformation of society. In this regard, they were at a disadvantage in competition with the pragmatic, reformist mainstream of middle-class British socialism, Fabianism. The Fabians, led more firmly than ever by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, remained democratic, gradualist, state socialists. They were given a boost by the growth of the state during the First World War. But even Fabianism had nothing to say about the problems of industrial decline, and its doctrine of governmental finance remained old-fashioned enough to please the strictest Gladstonian. Moreover, the Webbs discredited socialism to a degree by their lavish praise of the Soviet Union, which they visited in the 1930s. Utterly deluded, the Webbs commended Joseph Stalin for his efforts in constructing a "new civilisation."

In Wales and Scotland, the replacement of the Liberals by Labour as the party of the left opened a gap in the political expression of nationalism. In Wales, the war and the postwar years witnessed a decline of Nonconformity and the spread of socialism. The Labour party thus shouldered the Liberals aside, but as a class-based and centralized party, Labour did not express Welsh nationalist feelings to the satisfaction of all former radicals. In 1925, a number of former Welsh radicals joined a few conservative romantics

attracted to medievalism and Catholicism to form a new Welsh nationalist party, *Plaid Cymru*. The new party at first dedicated itself mainly to promoting the Welsh language and only later took up the cause of political autonomy for Wales. Strongly opposed by Lloyd George, *Plaid Cymru* remained tiny through the 1930s, but under the leadership of the passionate intellectual Saunders Lewis, it kept nationalism before the Welsh public.

In Scotland, the replacement of liberalism by Labour was less traumatic, perhaps because the leader of the Labour party in the 1920s, Ramsay MacDonald, was a Scot. But a dispute between the militants of the old Independent Labour party (ILP) and the moderates who made up the bulk of the membership split the Labour party in Scotland. Meanwhile, a Scottish literary renaissance in the 1920s promoted both political and cultural nationalism. Its greatest figure, socialist and Scottish nationalist poet Hugh MacDiarmid (1892–1978; pen name of Christopher Murray Grieve), inspired by the modernism of Yeats and Joyce as well as the social criticism of Carlyle, sought to destroy Scottish parochialism while promoting a literature in the Scottish vernacular. Intellectuals of the literary renaissance and former members of the ILP joined to establish the foundations of the Scottish Nationalist party (SNP) in 1928, but like *Plaid Cymru*, the SNP remained small through the 1930s.

Given the gravity of the depression in the 1920s and 1930s, it was inevitable that the Communist party on the one extreme and fascism on the other attracted some support. Many people, most of them intellectuals or militant labor organizers, thought that extreme social problems demanded extreme responses. The Communist Party of Great Britain was founded in 1920, in the first flowering of enthusiasm for the Bolshevik Revolution, but its revolutionary doctrine alienated the vast majority of the British left. The Labour party consistently refused to have anything to do with it, and the Trade Unions Congress (TUC) tried to ban Communists from the trade unions. At the time of the Spanish Civil War, however, a few leading intellectuals such as Stephen Spender believed that the Communist party promised to be the best defense against Fascism. Important as the Communist party became among certain intellectuals, its membership never amounted to more than about five thousand people. Moderate democratic socialism and radicalism remained the mainstream of British progressivism.

As for fascism, it had a moment of notoriety in the 1930s but soon faded. In 1930, Sir Oswald Mosley (1896–1980), an upper-class member of the Labour government, revolted against his party because of its unimaginative response to economic and social crisis. Mosley was an energetic and ambi-

tious convert to socialism who had adopted many Keynesian ideas. He developed a program of aggressive government action to direct the economy. When the Labour cabinet and then the party itself rejected his ideas, Mosley established the New Party and then the British Union of Fascists (BUF). His “blackshirts” (paramilitary party workers) and his own public posturing soon were imitating the Continental fascists, Hitler and Mussolini. There was some support for the BUF in the streets and a degree of sympathy for fascism in the upper class; however, the British public in general did not take to Mosley’s antiparliamentary stance, and the BUF had little impact on politics.

THE LLOYD GEORGE GOVERNMENT, 1918–1922

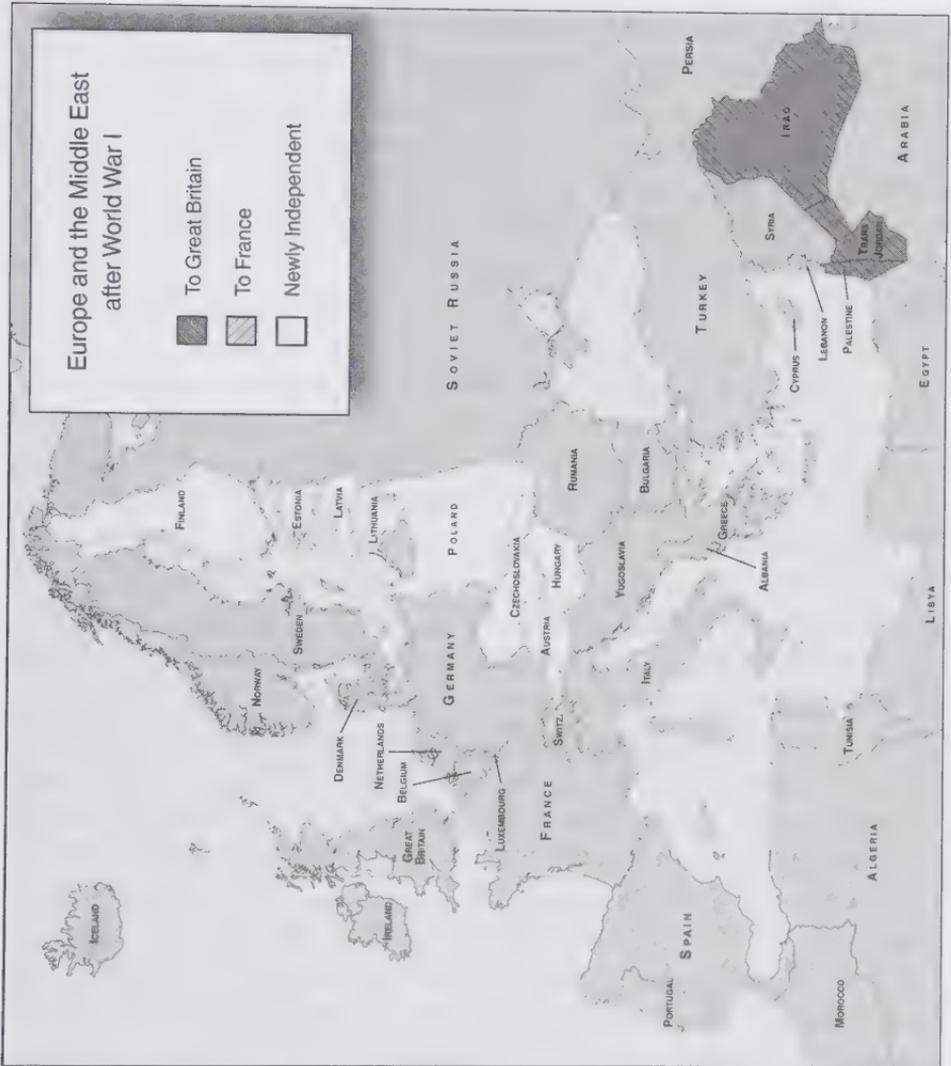
David Lloyd George dominated British politics at the end of the war, and in a sense through the early 1930s. Never a party loyalist, Lloyd George sought to continue his coalition government into peacetime. The war presented, he said, “an opportunity for reconstruction of industrial and economic conditions of this country such as has never been presented in the life of, probably, the world.” The Labour party preferred to reestablish its independence from the coalition, but the Conservatives, hypnotized by Lloyd George’s wartime leadership and eager to keep an antisocialist alliance together, decided to stick with the coalition. A general election, the first since 1910, was called for 1918. Lloyd George and Bonar Law, leader of the Conservative party, agreed to endorse some 600 candidates, about 150 of them Liberals who had supported Lloyd George. During the campaign, Lloyd George tried to emphasize reconstruction: Britain must be made a land “fit for heroes to live in.” But victory over the Germans and the performance of Lloyd George himself stood uppermost in voters’ minds. In what became known as the Coupon Election (because candidates approved by Lloyd George and Law received a letter of endorsement called a coupon), the coalition won a landslide victory: 384 Conservatives, 136 Coalition Liberals, 33 Asquithians, and 59 Labourites. As the second largest independent party, Labour now became the official opposition.

Lloyd George’s first task was the peace negotiations in Paris. He had begun his electoral campaign as a moderate on the question of how to treat the Germans. During the campaign, however, he succumbed to the vindictive spirit of the electorate. By the end, he had promised to punish the kaiser and to collect “the uttermost farthing” in reparations. This political stance weighed heavily on him in Paris, for members of Parliament reminded him of it when they thought he was becoming too generous to the defeated foe.

Lloyd George joined French premier Georges Clemenceau and American president Woodrow Wilson to form the “Big Three” in Paris. The British delegation was highly competent, but the British had not made systematic plans for the postwar settlement. Lloyd George instinctively adopted the role of mediator between Clemenceau and Wilson; he was also, however, bound by certain wartime agreements, by the imperial ambitions of some British statesmen, and by the expectations of the British public that the Germans would pay the cost of the war. Wilson sought to reach a comprehensive settlement of European boundaries by the principle of national self-determination and to provide for a new system of *open diplomacy* through a League of Nations. Clemenceau spoke for the French spirit of revenge and fear of German revival; thus, he wanted Germany to acknowledge guilt for causing the war and to pay reparations for war damages. He sought to keep Germany disarmed, to use the League of Nations to enforce the peace settlement on the Germans, and to form an alliance for collective security with the British and Americans. Lloyd George thought that a healthy Germany was necessary for the recovery of Europe (and for British trade), and he saw the League as an agency for revising the details of the peace settlement. Yet he accepted the French demand for an alliance, he agreed to a “war guilt” clause, and he insisted on elimination of the German navy and on an extremely high figure for reparations.

The Paris peace settlement, including the Treaty of Versailles between the Allies and Germany, gave the British much but not all that they wanted. Austria-Hungary was broken up, Poland restored, and Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia created as independent states. Germany remained intact, but lost Alsace-Lorraine to France and territories in eastern Europe to Poland and the newly created states. Germany had to admit guilt and to accept payment of reparations to the Allies for an unspecified amount (set in 1921 at the enormous sum of \$21 billion). The French were to occupy the Saar industrial valley in Germany for fifteen years, and the Rhineland was to be demilitarized. The German army was limited to one hundred thousand men, and certain types of armaments were forbidden. In addition, Britain won a mandate over German East Africa (Tanganyika), British colonies themselves picked up other German holdings, and Britain won the former Turkish territories of Palestine, Mesopotamia, and Trans-Jordan. Britain was thereby to remain the predominant power in the Middle East until after 1945.

Parliament ratified the Versailles Treaty almost unanimously, but a substantial portion of the British public soon turned against it, and the complex



Europe and the Middle East after WWI. World War I shattered the Russian, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian Empires and resulted in dramatic political changes in eastern Europe and the Middle East. It also left Britain far less able to control events in a rapidly changing world.

structure put together in Paris began to unravel almost immediately. When the United States rejected the Paris settlement as well as other European commitments, the British repudiated the military alliance with France. The newly created Soviet Union had not been invited to Paris and stood outside the agreements. Indeed, during the negotiations, the Allied powers, including Britain, sent troops to Russia in an abortive attempt to overthrow the Bolshevik government.

Meanwhile, Lloyd George turned to domestic matters. Unfortunately, his plans for reconstruction ran afoul of postwar economic depression. The Addison Housing Act of 1919, for example, was to provide subsidies to local governments to help build five hundred thousand houses; as the economy foundered, the program was scaled back and fewer than half of the houses planned were built. Similarly the Fisher Education Act of 1918 did succeed in raising the school-leaving age from twelve to fourteen years old, but its plans for expanded vocational and technical training for older children soon felt the budgetary axe.

Nor was Lloyd George able to solve the problem of the coal industry. Here his penchant for opportunism came to the fore. Agitation by the miners for better pay and shorter hours prodded him only into clever delaying tactics. He provided a government subsidy to wages and appointed a Royal Commission (the Sankey Commission) to report on the difficulties of the coal industry, but he then ignored its recommendations to nationalize coal royalties and amalgamate the smaller companies. Undoubtedly his most important achievement was the agreement with the Irish nationalists in 1921 that ended the Anglo-Irish War and established the Irish Free State.

In 1918, Bonar Law had remarked that Lloyd George "can be Prime Minister for life if he likes." Yet by the middle of 1922, the Welsh Wizard's enchantment over his coalition was wearing off. His one-man rule made his cabinet colleagues restless, and his blatant sale of peerages and knighthoods to men who contributed to his personal political fund offended Conservatives' sense of propriety. The Irish treaty infuriated die-hard Unionists. Coalition Liberals and Conservatives alike rejected his plan for fusion and formation of a new center party. Finally, his high-handed treatment of a crisis in the Middle East brought the discontent to a boil. In this so-called Chanak crisis, Lloyd George's support for Greece threatened to involve Britain in a war with Turkey. The matter was settled peaceably, but the Conservatives had had enough. In August 1922, Conservative MPs voted to withdraw from the coalition in favor of restoring the old party system. Lloyd George resigned his post that afternoon, and though no one expected it, he was never to hold office again.

MACDONALD AND BALDWIN

In the years between the fall of Lloyd George in 1922 and the premiership of Neville Chamberlain in 1937, the dominant figures in British politics were Ramsay MacDonald and Stanley Baldwin, two of the most puzzling

characters in recent British history. Both were charming men and proponents of reconciliation in British society, but both were afflicted with intellectual softness and an inclination to inaction; hence, they were responsible for drift in British policy. We will look at domestic policy first.

Ramsay MacDonald (1866–1937) led the Labour party from 1911 to 1914 and from 1922 to 1931, and became the first Labour prime minister in 1924; yet by the end of his career he had earned the undying enmity of Labour party loyalists. MacDonald was the illegitimate son of Scottish peasants. Given an adequate elementary education, he became a clerk, a party activist, and an able administrator. Handsome, a clever parliamentary tactician, and a gifted orator, he was also rather reserved and overly sensitive to criticism. Over time, as MacDonald developed an obtrusive vanity and a snobbish preference for high society, he grew increasingly uncomfortable with members of his own party and class.

Yet in his early career MacDonald was instrumental in the development of the Labour party and in advancing working-class interests. A nondoctrinaire ethical socialist, MacDonald believed in organic social evolution: he thought that socialism would grow from social progress and prosperity, not the other way around. As secretary of the fledgling Labour party from 1900 to 1911, MacDonald negotiated the electoral alliance with the Liberals. Then, as leader of the party after 1911, he helped persuade the radicals of the ILP to moderate their views and the trade unionists to think of the party as more than a union pressure group. As a pacifist, he opposed Britain's entry into World War I and resigned the leadership in 1914 when the party voted to support the war effort. This gave him a reputation for radicalism that he did not deserve. He returned to the leadership in 1922, thanks in large part to the votes of militants such as the Clydeside shipbuilders. He was to disappoint them grievously.

The opportunity for MacDonald to form a Labour government came earlier than anyone expected—in 1924. The election of 1922 had confirmed Labour as the official opposition. In 1923, Conservative prime minister Baldwin called a new general election on the issue of protective tariffs. The electorate still preferred free trade; hence, the vote left the Conservatives as the largest party but denied them a majority. Labour won 191 seats and stood as the second largest party; the Liberals (reunited under Asquith after Lloyd George's resignation) won 158 seats. Under the circumstances, several different governments might have been formed, and some politicians, like the violently anti-Bolshevik Winston Churchill, were desperate to keep Labour out. But Asquith decided to support a Labour government for at

least a short while, for Labour and Liberals alike advocated free trade. Asquith said, "If a Labour Government is ever to be tried in this country, as it will be sooner or later, it could hardly be tried under safer conditions." In January 1924, therefore, King George V asked MacDonald to form a government, and he accepted.

The first Labour government was a tame affair. MacDonald and the other Labour leaders could have followed either of two strategies: to pursue moderate measures and thereby stay in office or to run up the flag of a thorough socialist program that would rally party enthusiasm but soon be defeated. MacDonald, who thought that the prime objective was to show that Labour could govern, chose the former. The government hoped to pass a few modest measures and to gain experience, and that it did. Although no radical domestic legislation marked its nine months in office, the Wheatley Housing Act of 1924 did increase the subsidies that enabled local governments to construct affordable housing for low-wage workers; approximately five hundred thousand houses were built under the act. The first Labour government, however, offered no solutions for unemployment and industrial conflict. It did move in at least a slightly radical direction when, much to the horror of Conservative MPs, it negotiated a commercial treaty with the Soviet Union. But before a vote was taken on this controversial measure, the Campbell case brought down the government. The case was not actually very significant—the Labour government had abandoned prosecution of a Communist newspaperman named Campbell for allegedly inciting workers to mutiny—but when he lost a vote in the House on the issue, MacDonald elected to resign. He had done what he set out to do: he had proven that a Labour government could run the country and not lead it into revolution.

The Labour party both lost and won the subsequent election. It was soundly defeated, but the Liberals were annihilated. In other words, MacDonald lost the election, but won a big battle in his long-term campaign to supplant the Liberals as the party of the left. Moreover, largely because he was Labour's only major talent as an orator and parliamentary politician, MacDonald retained leadership of the party despite the British tradition that a party leader who pilots his party to electoral defeat must step down.

In the election of 1929 MacDonald led Labour to victory: this time Labour won the most seats in the House of Commons (288, with Conservatives winning 261 and Liberals only 59); yet again they had no absolute

majority. MacDonald formed his second government and pledged to address unemployment and reduce international tension. Unfortunately, the catastrophic global Great Depression struck almost immediately. Unemployment jumped to two million by 1930, and the loss of tax revenue caused a major budget deficit. MacDonald and the mainstream of his party had no clue as to the solution to fundamental problems within the capitalist system. They believed that nothing important could be done, for they looked to the general transformation of society by socialism.

The cabinet's dominant voice in economic matters belonged to the chancellor of the exchequer, Philip Snowden (1864–1937), a fiery teetotaler, a one-time idealistic leader of the ILP, and an autocratic and dogmatic believer in Gladstonian finance: free trade and balanced budgets. Along with Treasury officials and city of London bankers, Snowden believed that the budget had to be balanced in order to protect the pound sterling. This was a strategy suited to defeat *inflation*, but the economy was suffering from radical *deflation*. In 1931, an official committee forecast that the budget deficit would reach £120 million and recommended massive budget cuts, much of which would come from unemployment benefits.

The question of budget cuts split the Labour cabinet and ended MacDonald's second government. MacDonald told the king that his divided government would have to resign. After consulting various political leaders, George V asked MacDonald to form a National Government with support from all three parties. MacDonald agreed, even though his cabinet had not been asked to vote on the matter. Only three members of the cabinet (including Snowden) agreed to serve with him, and the great majority of the Labour party angrily denounced MacDonald's decision. They charged that MacDonald had conspired with the Conservatives and that he had given in to a "bankers' ramp," an engineered financial crisis designed to bring down the elected government. In fact, there had been no conspiracy. Instead, there was a failure of Labour ideas and a grievous lack of confidence by MacDonald in his colleagues.

MacDonald's National Government (1931–35) was little more than a Conservative government in disguise, with Stanley Baldwin (1867–1947) as its dominant figure. The National Government immediately cut the budget and went off the gold standard, and in 1932 abandoned free trade. Otherwise, its program was simply "Safety and the Union Jack." Its only contribution to economic recovery was to keep interest rates low, which encouraged borrowing and investment. Increasingly inactive and irrelevant to his

own cabinet. MacDonald finally resigned in 1935, and the National Government officially became what it had always been in actuality, a Conservative administration.

The new prime minister, Baldwin, had already served as premier twice before, in 1923 and 1924–29. He had risen to the leadership of the Tories, as he himself said, “by a succession of curious chances.” Once a prosperous ironmaster, Baldwin put himself forward as a traditional country gentleman. Kindly and modest in personality, he had no political goals beyond (1) achieving conciliation between industrialists and workers and (2) keeping Lloyd George out of office. As a minister in Lloyd George’s wartime coalition, Baldwin had been repulsed by the Welsh Wizard’s free-wheeling and irreverent style, and he had helped lead the Conservative revolt against Lloyd George in 1922. In the subsequent Conservative government, Bonar Law served as prime minister until ill health forced him to resign in 1923. George V rather surprisingly summoned Baldwin to succeed Law instead of the arrogant aristocrat Lord Curzon, mainly on the grounds that the prime minister ought to come from the House of Commons.

Baldwin’s first ministry (1923) was too short to be of much consequence, and by his third (1935–37) he was a spent force. But in his second administration (1924–29), Baldwin had ample opportunity to act on his commitment to industrial conciliation and social harmony. With little interest in legislation, he was lucky to have as minister of health the remarkably diligent and efficient Neville Chamberlain (1869–1940), a son of the late Joseph Chamberlain. Neville Chamberlain was responsible for passing an impressive series of acts (twenty-one in all) of social reform, including an extension of the old age pension, unemployment insurance, and health insurance systems; creation of the Central Electricity Board and the British Broadcasting Corporation; support for construction of some four hundred thousand houses; and abolition of the old Poor Law unions. Baldwin, however, took the lead in industrial relations, including the General Strike of 1926, and here his record fell short of his professed ideals.

Baldwin believed in capitalism, and he thought that postwar Britain’s lengthy economic depression was a phase in the business cycle that had to work itself out. As we saw in chapter 25, in the years leading up to the crisis of 1926, Baldwin refused to undertake reorganization of the coal industry or to persuade the coal owners to do it themselves. He allowed the return to the gold standard in 1925, which hurt the British coal industry by overpricing the product. Under the threat of a coal strike in 1925, Baldwin gave another temporary subsidy in aid of wages, as all British governments had



Edward VIII announces his abdication of the British throne over the radio in December 1936. The king's plan to marry an American divorcee precipitated a constitutional crisis.

done since the war, and appointed a new royal commission (the Samuel Commission). When it reported in 1926, Baldwin was unable to bring about the recommended restructuring of the coal industry or to persuade the miners to accept wage reductions.

His government did prepare well for the expected strike, as we have seen, and the public hailed Baldwin as the man who ended the General Strike. He failed, however, to follow through with a settlement of the coal miners' claims. He had pledged to "ensure a square deal to secure even justice between man and man," but the miners were forced to return to work on the employers' terms. And in 1927, he yielded to pressure from his party's right wing by passing an act prohibiting secondary strikes (strikes by unions not directly involved in the primary dispute) and providing that a member of a trade union had to *contract in* (that is, positively give his or her consent) before any part of his or her union dues could be spent by the union's political fund. Both these measures weakened the union movement and contributed to working-class disillusionment and passivity throughout the 1930s.

In his third administration, Baldwin had to deal with another matter of constitutional importance—the abdication of a king. George V died in 1936 and was succeeded by his handsome and fashionable son, Edward VIII. But Edward had been consorting with an American divorcee, Mrs. Wallis Simpson, and wished to marry her. This was impossible, given the king's position as head of the Church of England (which still prohibited remarriage after divorce). For once Baldwin took decisive action. He refused to consider amorganatic marriage for Edward, whereby Mrs. Simpson would have become Edward's wife but not queen. Baldwin made it clear that if Edward insisted on marrying Mrs. Simpson he would have to abdicate. This he did, in December 1936. Edward's younger brother was proclaimed George VI, and both the monarchy and the constitution weathered the crisis. Baldwin retired after George's coronation in 1937, with the thanks of Britons ringing in his ears. But within two years, the consequences of his indecision and indolence in foreign policy had destroyed his reputation.

BRITISH POWER AND INTERESTS BETWEEN THE WARS

Baldwin's successor as prime minister was an altogether different kind of man. Self-confident and decisive, Neville Chamberlain now focused exclusively on foreign affairs, with which Baldwin had always been uncomfortable. Chamberlain dominated his cabinet and conducted foreign policy practically alone. But before we judge his record in the international arena, we must examine the context of British power and interests in which he and his predecessors operated.

Britain, of course, remained a great power in 1919. Given the withdrawal of the United States from Europe and the Versailles Treaty's limitation of German armaments, as well as the collapse of the Russian Empire and the isolation of its successor state, the Soviet Union, Britain was arguably the strongest power in Europe and second only to the United States in the world as a whole. Nevertheless, scorched by war as the British psyche was, and distracted by the faltering economy, the British in the 1920s had little interest in maintaining great armaments or in involving themselves in Continental security arrangements. They did not even wish to pursue the traditional balance of power in Europe because that policy was thought to have formed part of the discredited prewar diplomatic system that had led to the Great War. Thus, in 1919, the Lloyd George government established a Ten-Year Rule, by which the armed forces were to assume each

year that there would be no major war for the next ten years. The army and air force were allowed to languish. Even the navy faced severe budgetary constraints. During the 1920s, the navy had only twenty battleships, all of them in the Atlantic and Mediterranean, with none for Singapore, the key British naval base in the Far East. Britain dropped the old treaty with Japan in 1922 at the insistence of the United States. Then by the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922, Britain accepted parity in battleships with the United States and a fixed ratio of capital ships (battleships and battle cruisers) with Japan, France, and Italy of 5:3:1.75:1.75, respectively. In 1930, the same 5:5:3 ratio among Britain, the United States, and Japan was extended to all ships.

Yet Britain's commitments remained huge. The British now accounted for only about 10 percent of the world's industrial output, but the British Empire encompassed 25 percent of the world's land surface. Most Britons between the wars believed that the Empire was more important than ever, but in fact it was of questionable value. From Africa to Egypt to Palestine to India, the British had to maintain military and naval forces as well as administrative structures, but this cumbersome imperial realm could not be readily mobilized for British objectives.

The dominions, for example, continued to develop their own independent policies and interests. They demanded to be represented at the Paris peace conference and were accepted as part of the British delegation. They became independent members of the League of Nations. During the Chanak crisis, the British government requested military assistance from the dominions, but with the exception of New Zealand, they were far from enthusiastic about supporting a British matter that might involve them in war. From that time on, they insisted that they would have to be consulted before they would support British policy.

Then the creation of the Irish Free State in 1921–22 made it clear that dominion status would involve complete autonomy under the Crown. This was codified by an imperial conference in 1926 and clarified once and for all by the Statute of Westminster in 1931, which can be taken as the foundation of the British Commonwealth. In the following year, the National Government established a protective tariff and opened discussions with the dominions on behalf of a system of imperial tariff preferences. The Ottawa Commonwealth Conference of 1932 disappointed this hope, for although imperial preferences were accepted, the dominions rejected free trade within the Empire. They did not wish to sacrifice their own interests for imperial economic union. All of these developments reflected credit on



Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of Indian nationalism and advocate of nonviolence and passive resistance to British rule, shown here in front of No. 10 Downing Street, London.

Britain's comparative flexibility in allowing self-government to the former colonies, but they also meant that only in extreme crisis could Britain hope to call on its dominions for support.

Even India was presenting major problems for British power. In the late nineteenth century, middle-class Indian nationalists had established the Indian National Congress to fight for Indian independence. In the 1890s a more popular protest entered the field, based on a Hindu revival and mass anti-Western conservatism. The Liberal government had attempted to conciliate Indian nationalism in 1907–08 by allowing limited Indian participation in government at both the provincial and national levels. These reforms, however, were far from responsible government, and during the Great War, the British promised additional measures in order to maintain Indian support. In these so-called Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, implemented in the immediate postwar period, the British granted *dyarchy*, a dual system of government at the provincial level in which the Indians had responsibility for certain functions, though not internal security. But this did not satisfy

Indian nationalists. By the end of the war, Mahatma Gandhi's campaign of nonviolent noncooperation began to mobilize millions of Indians.

The nationalist agitation put enormous pressure on the British. In 1919, General Reginald Dyer's troops fired on a peaceful meeting at Amritsar and killed some four hundred demonstrators. British public opinion was passionately divided over the incident, but in general, despite the passionate imperialism of a few Conservatives such as Churchill, British will to rule India by force was dwindling. Socialists and pacifists both opposed the use of force in the Empire. Many people in the British left supported the development of Indian self-government. The issue threatened to split the Conservative party, with the die-hards standing firmly against any Indian reforms, and more moderate voices recognizing that the Indian nationalist movement was irresistible. Even the conciliator, Baldwin accepted the idea of wider powers of Indian self-rule. The India Act of 1935, passed by the National Government, granted responsible government to the Indians at the provincial level and a partially elected legislature at the national level. Die-hard imperialists were furious: according to Churchill, the act marked "the definite decline, and even disappearance, of our authority in India."

Despite the development of powers such as Japan and the United States, British foreign policy remained centered on Europe, and on the central problems of France, the Soviet Union, Germany, and the League of Nations. Desperate for security, the French depended on Britain to offset the potential power of a revengeful Germany. British policy makers, however, did not share France's anti-German views and so did not wish to tie Britain to a mutual security treaty with the French. Instead, British governments saw themselves as mediators between France and Germany and tended to regard the French as greater threats to European stability than the Germans.

Moreover, many Britons desired a strong Germany to stand as a bulwark against the spread of communism and the threat posed by the Soviet Union. Conservatives (and many Liberals) regarded the Bolshevik government as an outlaw regime, especially because the Soviets repudiated the Russian war debt to Britain. Labourites were less reflexively anti-Soviet. MacDonald's first Labour government attempted to establish normal relations with the Soviet Union, but as we have seen this was electorally unpopular, and Baldwin's government in 1925 abandoned the effort. In his second government, MacDonald did succeed in establishing formal relations with the Soviet Union, yet many British political leaders remained deeply suspicious of the Soviet government.

Partly, then, because of a fear of the Soviet Union, but more importantly, because of a desire for economic stability, most British policy makers sought to encourage the restoration of Germany to a normal role in Europe. In 1919 Keynes had launched a severe attack on the Versailles settlement, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, in which he argued among other things that the reparations demanded of Germany were too high to allow for a stable central European economy. His argument proved persuasive to many British political and diplomatic leaders, who from 1919 on tried in various ways to persuade the French not to demand too much from Germany and sought to redress Germany's legitimate grievances resulting from Versailles. The British thus welcomed the American-brokered Dawes Plan of 1924, which stretched Germany's payments over a longer period, and the Young Plan of 1929, which scaled down Germany's payments. The British also responded enthusiastically to the Locarno agreement of 1925, whereby Germany sought to normalize relations with the Western powers by making permanent its boundaries with France and Belgium. Baldwin's government guaranteed the Franco-German agreement, safe in the knowledge that it was not a genuine mutual-security treaty. Likewise, the British supported Germany's reentry into the League of Nations in 1926.

As for the League, the British differed sharply from the French in their interpretation of its purpose. Whereas the French wanted to make the League a collective security agreement for enforcing compliance with the Treaty of Versailles, the British regarded it as a forum for airing international differences. The British defeated two French attempts to put muscle into the League—the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance (1923) and the Geneva Protocol (1924). Each in effect would have committed the League to action against an aggressor state. The British on the whole preferred disarmament agreements to the concept of action by the League, although the Labour party rather confusingly supported both. The trouble with disarmament as a policy was that the great powers found it very hard to negotiate the necessarily complex multilateral agreements (the naval treaties were the only accomplishments), and each failure by the former Allies to agree to a disarmament formula only angered the Germans, who had been *forced* to disarm.

Rapidly evolving events of the early and mid-1930s exposed the weaknesses of British power and policies. In 1931, the Japanese invaded Manchuria, and the British did not lead the League toward halting the aggression. In 1933, economic depression and loathing for the Treaty of Versailles brought Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party to power in Germany. Hitler soon pulled out of a major disarmament conference in Geneva, for which

the British had high hopes, even though Germany had already won preliminary approval of equal status in armaments, and then he withdrew from the League of Nations. In March 1935, Hitler announced that Germany would not adhere to the arms limitations of the treaty, and one year later he sent German troops back into the Rhineland, also in contravention of the treaty.

In 1936, civil war broke out in Spain between the republic, supported by the left (liberals, socialists, and communists) and the rebels, supported by the right (monarchists, the church, and the fascists). The Spanish civil war deeply and emotionally divided British public opinion, and a number of British radicals and socialists volunteered for service with the republic. Baldwin's government pursued a policy of international nonintervention, even though both Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany actively supported the rebels and the Soviet Union actively supported the republic. This ineffectual policy satisfied no one in Britain.

In 1935, Italy invaded Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in direct contradiction of the charter of the League. British public opinion supported collective action of some kind by the League against Italy. The National Government ruled out military force in favor of mild economic sanctions. When the sanctions had no effect, Baldwin's government, mindful that Britain had no allies, sought to buy Mussolini's favor by proposing a partition of Abyssinia to his advantage. This backstairs betrayal outraged the British public and had to be dropped, along with the foreign secretary (Sir Samuel Hoare) who had made the offer. But nothing more was done for Abyssinia, which Italy annexed in 1936. The whole affair destroyed any hope for an effective League of Nations.

Against the backdrop of these events, Baldwin took the first halting steps toward British rearmament, although, as he later confessed, there was little public support for it. The British people desperately wanted to avoid war and understandably thought that armaments led to military conflict. In 1933 the Oxford Union voted in favor of the resolution "that this House will in no circumstance fight for its King and Country" and a Labour party pacifist won a by-election (special election) in London. A public opinion poll of June 1935 (the Peace Ballot) showed that a huge majority of those consulted supported general disarmament, even though they contradictorily supported League sanctions that might lead to war. British policy makers and ordinary people alike feared strategic bombing, particularly after Baldwin proclaimed that the "bomber will always get through."

Yet rearmament did begin, and Baldwin was the key figure. In 1932 the National Government abandoned the Ten-Year Rule. It increased funds for the air force in 1934 and again in 1935 so that the Royal Air Force (RAF)

began to overcome the massive handicaps of design and production that had limited it. Funding for air defense, however, was siphoned from the navy and army; these services were still in poor shape in 1939. Perhaps most importantly, a government committee for scientific air defense research produced a system of radio direction finding—radar—by the mid-1930s.

CHAMBERLAIN AND THE COMING OF WAR, 1937–1939

When Neville Chamberlain became prime minister in 1937, he meant to put an end to what he rightly saw as drift in British foreign policy. It is thus a cruel irony that his good intentions ended in disaster. After serving for a number of years under Baldwin, Chamberlain concluded that Baldwin's relaxed style was inadequate. A highly effective minister of health from 1924 to 1929 and a dominating chancellor of the exchequer from 1931 to 1937, Chamberlain was experienced, clear minded, and logical, but also narrow and arrogant. He possessed a reserved, even bleak personality. "In manner he is glacial rather than genial," said one colleague. In his self-assurance, he was disdainful of many of the members of his government and chose to listen to only a select few. Unfortunately, he had poor understanding of human nature; hence, he misread Hitler.

Chamberlain had no love for Nazism and knew that Hitler's regime was brutal. But Chamberlain as a good businessman believed that all heads of state would know their own interests and thus could work out conflicting claims. He was concerned about the degenerating conditions of European relations and troubled about the slow pace of British rearmament—although he himself as chancellor of the exchequer under Baldwin had kept a tight rein on defense funding. Like many of Britain's military leaders, he was convinced of both Germany's military power and Britain's weakness. It has been argued that in his policy toward Germany after 1937—*appeasement*—he was buying time. Actually, he fashioned his policy because he thought it would work. He believed that Britain could and should deal independently with Germany because the Soviet Union was not trustworthy, because Britain had few interests in common with the small states of eastern Europe, and because an alliance with France would limit Britain's cherished freedom of action and provoke Germany besides.

Moreover, like the majority of British politicians and statesmen between the wars, Chamberlain thought that Germany had many legitimate grievances as a result of the Versailles Treaty. Therefore, although he knew he was bargaining with a weak hand, he thought he could reach an agreement with

Hitler. Appeasement of Germany became his deliberate policy: “I do not see why we shouldn’t say to Germany ‘give us satisfactory assurances that you won’t use force to deal with the Austrians and Czechoslovakians, and we will give you similar assurances that we won’t use force to prevent the changes you want, if you can get them by peaceful means.’” Such a view might have been sensible with ordinary German statesmen, but it was based on a total misunderstanding of Hitler and his movement. Chamberlain’s appeasement policy only persuaded Hitler that Britain was a weak, decadent nation.

Chamberlain did not brook any opposition to his policies from within his government. He dismissed critics such as Sir Robert Vansittart, Philip Cunliffe-Lister (Lord Swinton), and Anthony Eden (foreign secretary in 1937). He ignored the little band of Conservatives in Parliament led by Harold Macmillan, who raised the alarm about German militarism. He was fortunate—and the nation unfortunate—that the party of the Opposition could mount no effective argument against him. The Labour party was divided and weak, unable to reconcile its hostility to Nazism, its devotion to collective security, and its pacifism. Chamberlain’s chief opponent, then, was not a Labour leader but rather Winston Churchill, who had been attacking the government (not always fairly) about failure to rearm since 1933.

Churchill had gained much and varied experience in his long and remarkable career in Parliament and in cabinet office since before the Great War. Amazingly eloquent, energetic, and patriotic, Churchill had shifted his flag from the Liberals to the Conservatives, mainly because of his antisocialism, between 1922 and 1924 and then had served as chancellor of the exchequer under Baldwin from 1924 to 1929. Churchill took his outlook and policies not from social science or political expediency, but from his interpretation of history. He held what is called a *Whiggish* view of English history, in which the main theme is the glorious, progressive evolution of English law and institutions. Churchill had no love for fascism but no concern about it as such, nor did he oppose military aggression in itself. But as the descendant of the great duke of Marlborough, he feared the domination of the Continent by any one power, the latest example of which was Germany.

For much of the interwar period, however, Churchill often seemed eccentric and out-of-date. A fanatical anti-Bolshevik, he tended to equate all forms of socialism, even the very moderate variety espoused by the Labour party, with revolution. He also was a die-hard imperialist who opposed every step toward accommodation of Indian nationalism. To him dominion status for India was “a crime” and Gandhi a “naked fakir.” Thus, he parted company

with Baldwin over India in 1931 and resigned from the Tory front bench. He was not invited to serve in the National Government. His support for King Edward VIII in his desire to marry an American divorcee struck many as ridiculous. He also exaggerated the buildup of the German Luftwaffe, and he underestimated the rearmament steps of the British government. Not surprisingly, when he “cried wolf” about German rearmament from 1933, he won scant response.

The first major step taken by Hitler after Chamberlain became prime minister came in March 1938, when Germany annexed Austria following an intense propaganda and diplomatic campaign. Churchill was alarmed, but Chamberlain was not. Czechoslovakia was Hitler’s obvious next target because the Versailles settlement had assigned a significant number of Germans to the new state. Chamberlain believed that Hitler wanted to take only Germans into the Reich, not other nationalities, and that this was a reasonable objective. Moreover, Chamberlain refused to make an alliance with France and Czechoslovakia on grounds that it would cause the Germans to feel encircled.

He concluded that he should himself mediate the Czechoslovakian problem in order to avoid war—in other words, he would pressure the Czechs to grant the ethnic Germans living in Czechoslovakia (the Sudeten Germans) all of their demands for autonomy. In September 1938, relations between the Czech government and the Sudeten Germans (backed by Hitler) reached a crisis, and Chamberlain flew to Germany to settle the matter with Hitler personally, without consulting the Czechs. In the course of three trips to Germany over a two-week period, he agreed to a plan whereby Germany won immediate occupation of all disputed Czech territories. During this Munich Crisis, international tension was extremely high, and the fear of war with Germany pervaded Britain. Chamberlain spoke for many of his countrymen when he said in a radio broadcast:

How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing.

When Chamberlain returned from Munich with the final agreement, which included a statement signed by himself and Hitler that Britain and Germany would never again go to war (“peace in our time”), the British public was wild with relief.

A minority of informed people, however, were humiliated by Britain’s role in giving away a section of a sovereign nation, including a significant segment of that nation’s defenses. Churchill called the Munich deal “a total

Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain departing for Munich and a meeting with Hitler, September 1938. He returned to claim that he had achieved “peace in our time.”



and unmitigated defeat.” When in March 1939 Hitler annexed the rest of Czechoslovakia, public and political opinion alike turned against Chamberlain. The Conservative party especially revolted in anger. Chamberlain realized that opinion in the House of Commons now demanded resolute resistance to Hitler; thus, at the end of March he joined the French in declaring that, if Germany attacked Poland, Britain would go to war. Chamberlain, however, still believed that peace with Hitler was possible, and besides, the British and French had no real way of aiding the Poles.

The only sensible tactic at the moment was to make an alliance with the Soviet Union for defense against Germany, but Chamberlain still profoundly distrusted the Soviets and the Poles would allow no Soviet troops on their territory. Italy and Germany signed a Pact of Steel in May 1939, and still the British delayed in reaching an agreement with the Soviets. Then, in August, Germany and the Soviet Union stunned the world by reaching their own agreement, which opened the door to a German invasion of Poland. The attack came on September 1, 1939, and the British declared war on Germany on September 3. Only Mosley’s British Union of Fascists protested, and their numbers were very small. Chamberlain said, “Everything I have worked for, everything I have hoped for, everything I have believed in during

my public life, has crashed in ruins.” Churchill, on the other hand, later wrote that “a very strong sense of calm came over me. . . . I felt a security of mind. . . . The glory of old England, peace-loving and ill-prepared as she was, but instant and fearless at the call of honour, thrilled my being and seemed to lift our fate to those spheres far removed from earthly facts and physical sensations.”

Historians of Britain look back over the record of events between 1919 and 1939 with a sense of maddening frustration. Why did the British not recognize the danger presented by Hitler and take the forceful steps to stop him before war broke out? Why did the British remain so unprepared and seem to conduct their affairs with such naiveté and lethargy? Why did they not stick to their tried-and-true policy of a balance of power in Europe? The answers in part lay in Britain’s understandable revulsion against war after the horrors of 1914–18. Most Britons wanted to avoid involvement in another war, and thus they shunned armaments and entangling alliances. They also no longer had the economic power to field massive armed forces without feeling the bite dearly. Troubled by decaying older industries and long-term depression, the British believed that peace would be maintained through international conciliation and stability, not alliances and collective security. They failed to understand that Hitler was a new kind of force in the modern world, that he was driven by demons almost beyond the imagination of rational beings. One thing can be said for Chamberlain after all: his bending over backward to appease Hitler in September 1938 was an ultimate test that Hitler then failed for all Britons to see; thus, when the British finally did decide to fight, they knew it was a just war, and they came into the battle united.

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Chapter 27

Britain and World War II

When writing his justly famous history of World War II, Churchill designated 1940 for the British as “their finest hour.” It is a label that should be applied to the whole of the British experience in the war, and it was true in more ways than one. The British people displayed admirable courage and fortitude throughout the war, summoning remarkable inner resources and willingness to sacrifice for the war effort. They also showed a sense of commonality and a commitment to social reconstruction that was doubly admirable in view of the class conflict and social disorders of the interwar period. As a direct result of the war effort, the British appeared to retain their status as a great power and build a welfare state that expressed a humanitarian public consensus until the 1970s. Time was to show that the former was illusory, but the latter was genuine.

STANDING ALONE, SEPTEMBER 1939 TO JUNE 1941

As World War II began, British efforts against Germany were ineffectual. The Chamberlain government realized that the British had no way to assist Poland, and the Germans (aided by the Soviets, who invaded Poland from the east in order to claim their pickings) completed their conquest of that tragic nation by the end of September 1939. The Chamberlain government refused even to bomb Germany, for it still hoped to avoid an all-out war, and the French army stood still behind its defensive position facing Germany, the Maginot Line. In any case, the lack of British preparedness would have prevented an effective response to the new kind of warfare unleashed by the Germans—the *blitzkrieg*, or lightning war. Adapted, ironically enough, from the ideas of British theorists who were ignored in Britain, blitzkrieg emphasized speed and movement, with armored units (the *Panzer* divisions) backed up by tactical air support shocking the enemy and racing through gaps to disorganize and demoralize them. German tanks and

screaming *Stuka* dive bombers soon earned a terrifying reputation among the Allies. Blitzkrieg revolutionized warfare itself. It took the British a year to learn the lesson and adjust.

As in the past, the British set high store by naval blockade, and the Royal Navy quickly assumed its positions covering German ports. Unfortunately the British reckoned without either German air power or Hitler's determination to establish *autarky* (national economic self-sufficiency). German U-boats once again made close blockade impossible; thus, although the Royal Navy did sweep the seas of German surface raiders, the U-boats endangered British shipping, including the most powerful warships. Submarines sank the aircraft carrier *Courageous* and the battleship *Royal Oak* in the first months of the war. Moreover, British ships proved to be very vulnerable to air attacks. Thus, when the British decided to aid Finland, which had been attacked by the Soviet Union in November 1939, and to cut off Germany's iron ore shipments from Sweden in the process, they were unable to do so. Then, in a serious effort to stop the passage of the iron ore through Norway, the British decided to mine Norwegian waters and to occupy the port of Narvik. The Germans, however, outmaneuvered them with a quick seaborne and parachute invasion of Norway and Denmark in April 1940. The Royal Navy, under heavy air attack, was unable to prevent German landings or to support the British troops put ashore at Narvik. In June 1940, the British had to withdraw all their troops, and both Denmark and Norway were in German hands.

The Norwegian fiasco brought down the Chamberlain government. Tainted by appeasement and blamed (not entirely fairly) for Britain's lack of preparedness, Chamberlain and his cabinet had not conducted the war with any drive or imagination. The foreign secretary, Lord Halifax, entertained hopes of settlement with Germany well into the spring of 1940. In early May, when it was clear that the Norwegian campaign had gone sour, Conservative backbenchers (ordinary MPs) revolted. L. S. Amery, who had been a critic of appeasement, attacked Chamberlain in the House of Commons, ending his speech with Cromwell's famous dismissal of the Rump Parliament following the seventeenth-century civil war: "You have sat here too long for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!" When Chamberlain barely survived a Labour motion of censure, he resigned.

Winston Churchill succeeded Chamberlain, although as first lord of the admiralty he had been largely responsible for the failure in Norway. Churchill by then had become the symbol of opposition to appeasement and

Chamberlain's half-hearted war effort. On accepting the king's commission to form a government, Churchill later wrote,

I was conscious of a profound sense of relief. At last I had the authority to give directions over the whole scene. I felt as if I were walking with Destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and this trial. . . . I was sure I should not fail.

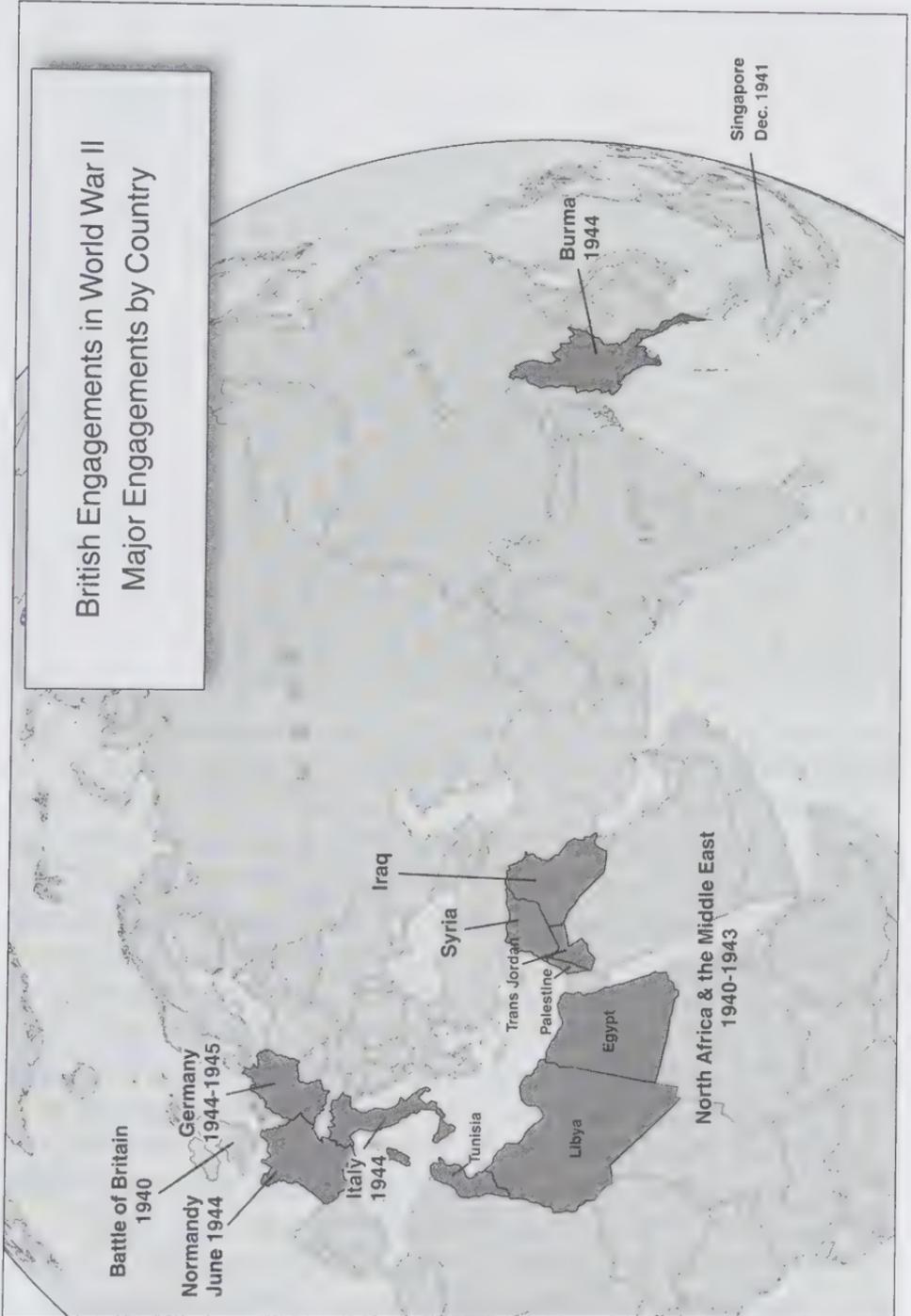
Churchill formed a National Government including Liberals and Labourites as well as Conservatives. It was an extremely able group. Clement Attlee (1883–1967), leader of the Labour party, became deputy prime minister; Ernest Bevin (1881–1951), secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union and chairman of the Trade Unions Congress (TUC), became minister of Labour and National Service; and Lord Beaverbrook served as minister for aircraft production. Churchill insisted on serving as minister of defense in a small inner war cabinet, and, later, becoming leader of the Conservative party. There would be no replay of the First World War's conflict between "frock coats" and "brass hats." Churchill from the outset took an active role in practically every aspect of the war effort, incessantly demanding more imagination and rapid action from his subordinates and urging the generals to take the offensive. But he was never able to dictate policy. "All I wanted was compliance with my wishes," he said, "after a reasonable discussion." Immediately after becoming prime minister, Churchill gave to the House of Commons the first of his magnificent wartime speeches that somehow said what the British people needed and wanted to hear. The new government had nothing to offer, he said, but "blood, toil, tears, and sweat." They had but one aim: "Victory—victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror; victory, however long and hard the road may be."

The very day Churchill became prime minister, May 10, 1940, the Germans turned their blitzkrieg to the west, invading the Netherlands, Belgium, and France. The speed of their tank columns was too much for the old-fashioned Allied armies. Within three weeks, the Dutch and Belgians had surrendered, and the German army had sped through France to the coast. The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) of ten divisions had been deployed in northern France on the Belgian frontier, but it was forced rapidly backward as the Germans broke the neighboring French defenses. In the midst of the rout, some British units fought well; however, by late May the BEF had retreated to a beachhead around Dunkirk on the English Channel, less than thirty miles from Dover. As the German tanks paused to allow the dive bombers to pound the beleaguered and exhausted troops, it looked as if the British would lose their entire army.

The evacuation of the BEF and some, at least, of the French army from Dunkirk was a miracle of improvisation. Between May 27 and June 4, while the RAF and the *Luftwaffe* fought overhead, some 850 British vessels took about 200,000 British and 140,000 French troops to safety in England. The navy, of course, carried the bulk of the troops, losing six destroyers in the process. In addition, hundreds of small private boats—tugs, yachts, fishing boats, ferries, and coastal merchant vessels—made trip after trip into the cauldron and back. Dunkirk was a defeat, for thousands of British and French troops were left behind, and the BEF lost all of its tanks and heavy equipment. Yet the nucleus of the British army was saved to fight another day. In Britain Dunkirk was viewed as a glorious achievement. The “spirit of Dunkirk” signified high morale and resolution among all Britons and gave them confidence that however grim the military situation seemed they would not lose.

France capitulated to Germany on June 22, 1940. From that day for exactly one year, the British stood alone against German and Italian power. It must be remembered that Germany in 1940 was much more powerful than Britain, for Germany had a population of seventy million against Britain’s forty-eight million and produced 50 percent more coal and steel and 75 percent more iron. The German army and air force were much larger than Britain’s. The British could expect help from the dominions, which entered the war voluntarily, but they needed time to mobilize. Hence, Britain stood in greater danger even than in 1805, when Napoleon threatened to invade. In July, Hitler and his generals began planning operation Sea Lion, the invasion of Britain. The German navy began collecting landing barges in the ports of France and the Low Countries. The Germans, however, knew that they would not be able to put the *Wehrmacht* (army) ashore unless the *Luftwaffe* controlled the skies; otherwise, the Royal Navy would destroy the invasion armada. Churchill in July 1940 had made the “hateful” decision to destroy the French fleet at Oran to keep it from falling into German hands. Thus, the Germans in the summer of 1940 opened their campaign against the RAF.

The struggle between the RAF and the *Luftwaffe*—the Battle of Britain, the most dramatic battle of the war—lasted throughout August and September of 1940. The combatants were closely matched: the Germans had the advantage in number of aircraft, but the British fought over their own territory, which meant that their fighters could stay in combat longer and that they could recover at least some of their downed pilots. Furthermore,



British involvement in World War II. Britain's imperial commitments help explain the broad reach of its military operations during World War II. The more than five long years of war across the globe drained Britain's economic resources but united its people.



The Battle of Britain, 1940. *A Hawker Hurricane on its way to engage German bombers as they crossed the south coast of England.*

the British had radar, which allowed them to detect incoming German planes. Fortunately for the British, their rearmament in the mid-1930s had produced two fighter planes, the Spitfire and the Hurricane, which were the equal of the best German planes. The chief of British Fighter Command, Sir Hugh Dowding, had refused to waste these planes in the futile battle of France; thus, when the Battle of Britain started, Fighter Command had some 690 first-class aircraft, whereas the Germans had about 1,000 plus 1,500 bombers. Every day the skies over southeastern England were filled with the vapor trails of airplanes in combat.

The worst period of the battle came in late August, when the Luftwaffe concentrated on the British fighter bases. But then Hitler ordered the Luftwaffe to shift its attack to London, in retaliation for an RAF raid on Berlin. That switch gave some relief to Fighter Command. On September 15, the German air assault reached its climax, but the RAF beat it back. Finally, in October, Hitler cancelled the planning for Sea Lion. Of the British fighter pilots, Churchill said that “never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.”



London under attack: *The most famous British photograph of World War II shows St. Paul's Cathedral, London, sailing through the bombs during the Blitz, December 1940.*

The Battle of Britain, however, was followed by a massive German bombing attack on British cities, above all London. This *Blitz*, as the British called it, went on from August 1940 to May 1941. Night after night German bombers appeared over London and other cities on the coasts and in the South and Midlands. The blitz destroyed or damaged over three million homes, much of the City of London, the East End of London, the House of Commons, St. Paul's Cathedral, and Buckingham Palace. Coventry and Birmingham were severely bombed in November 1940, and the following April saw fifteen hundred wounded and nine hundred dead in a single night attack on Belfast. All told, during the blitz about thirty thousand British civilians were killed, the majority of them in London. But in spite of the dire predictions made in the 1920s and 1930s, British morale was not broken, nor was production seriously damaged. Most Britons each day went about their business despite the nightly air raids, fires, and retreats to air raid shelters.

The RAF replied in kind, attempting to destroy German industrial production by long-range bombing. Unprotected by fighters over Germany, however, the slow British bombers were easy targets for anti-aircraft guns and fighter planes. As losses grew, the RAF resorted to night bombing, which was too inaccurate to be very effective. The German populace, like the

British, did not wilt under long-range bombing, and German production went up steadily, reaching its peak in 1944. Strategic bombing, nevertheless, was one of the few ways the British had in 1940–41 of taking the offensive against Germany. More than half of all British war production thus went to the construction of heavy bombers.

The British also benefited from the unacknowledged cooperation of Ireland. During World War II, the Irish Free State remained neutral despite heavy pressure from Churchill and the British government. In actual fact, however, the Irish government leaned toward the British side. British planes were allowed to fly over Ireland and downed Allied pilots were returned to their British bases, whereas downed German pilots were interned, and Irish intelligence reported German submarine movements to the British.

Meanwhile, the British were able to engage the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and their allies) in the Mediterranean and Middle East, with mixed results. The British army faced large Italian forces in Abyssinia and North Africa and although badly outnumbered defeated them in both places. Instead of consolidating their victory, however, Britain's generals (against Churchill's warnings) decided to aid the Greeks in their struggle against invading Italian forces. Hitler intervened to help the Italians in Greece just before the British arrived; hence, the British troops came just as the Greek army was collapsing, and they had to withdraw in the spring of 1941 in a humiliating repeat of Dunkirk. The island of Crete fell to German paratroopers soon after. The Germans also intervened in North Africa, sending the Afrika Korps under General Erwin Rommel, "the Desert Fox," to aid the Italians. A master of tank warfare, Rommel drove the British back to Egypt and threatened the Suez Canal, the most important British possession in the region. For the next two years, the desert war against the Germans, in which columns of tanks operated like land-based fleets, was to dominate British war making, but it was never more than a sideshow for the Germans.

These were desperate times for the British. By early 1941, Britain had almost run out of financial resources. Churchill knew that without American help the British could not win, and he devoted much energy into coaxing the Americans into the fray. When the war broke out, isolationist opinion kept the United States neutral. However, after France fell and the blitz was pounding London, American opinion shifted in Britain's favor. President Franklin Roosevelt strongly sympathized with Britain and realized that American security depended on Britain's survival. In November 1939, he put the sale of American arms on a cash-and-carry basis, which favored Britain.

After the fall of France, he adopted the policy of giving all aid possible to Britain short of war. He traded fifty destroyers to Britain in return for rights to build bases in British colonies in the Western Hemisphere. In March 1941, Roosevelt proclaimed America the “arsenal of democracy,” and through the Lend-Lease Program he pledged to sell, lend, or lease any supplies the British needed. In the process, the United States took most of Britain’s gold reserves and foreign investments and restricted their exports. As Keynes said, “We threw good housekeeping to the winds. But we saved ourselves and helped to save the world.”

THE TURN OF THE TIDE, JUNE 1941 TO JANUARY 1943

The nature of the war changed radically on June 22, 1941, when Hitler’s forces invaded the Soviet Union. Hitler’s gaze had always been eastward; his dream of a thousand-year-old Reich centered on the Soviet Union’s rich agricultural and industrial regions west of the Urals. The British had tried to warn the Soviets of the impending German invasion, but Stalin ignored them and the German army moved rapidly eastward. By October the German army stood on the outskirts of Leningrad and Moscow. Churchill, the former rabid anti-Bolshevik, did not hesitate to pledge Britain’s support to the Soviet Union. The one thing that now mattered was to defeat Nazi Germany. “If Hitler invaded Hell,” he declared, “I would make at least a favourable reference to the Devil in the House of Commons.” In July, Britain and the Soviet Union signed a formal alliance. Britain at last was no longer alone.

Given the initial success of the German army in the Soviet invasion, however, Churchill’s principal hope was still the United States. He met President Roosevelt at Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, in August 1941 to seek American help, especially in defending the British Empire in the Pacific. Roosevelt refused Churchill’s specific requests and resorted instead to a general statement of principles, the Atlantic Charter, which would be acceptable to the American electorate. But the Japanese solved Churchill’s problem of involving the Americans when they attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, as part of an all-out offensive against not only American but also British, French, and Dutch territories across the Pacific. The United States declared war on Japan the next day, and Churchill had issued a British declaration of war on Japan even before the American Congress could act.

Hitler had signed an anti-Soviet pact with the Japanese in 1936, and in hopes of diverting American naval power away from the Atlantic, he had promised the Japanese to declare war on the United States if the Japanese attacked first. He kept his promise on December 11. Now there was a genuine worldwide war, and the Americans were totally committed on Britain's side. Churchill wrote: "So we had won after all! . . . England would live; the Commonwealth of Nations and the Empire would live."

In a major conference in Washington, DC, during December 1941 and January 1942, Churchill and Roosevelt made their plans for the conduct of the war. Although the British were now heavily dependent on their stronger partner, Churchill persuaded the Americans to adopt his grand strategy: that Germany must be defeated before Japan. Further, the two allies formed an extremely close partnership, in which strategic decisions were to be made by a combined chiefs of staff operating under the basic decisions made by Churchill and Roosevelt themselves. The warm personal relationship between the prime minister and the president made possible this arrangement, as did their common desire to avoid the divisions that had hampered the effectiveness of Britain and France in the First World War. No alliance like this had ever been made before.

The entry of the United States, however, did not bring immediate relief to Britain. The end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942 instead brought disaster after disaster to British forces. In the Pacific, much of the British Empire collapsed before the Japanese military onslaught. Since the First World War, the Japanese had concerned themselves with increasing their power and securing their economic future by expanding first into China and then into the southeastern Pacific, where the Netherlands, France, and Britain had many colonies. The British between the wars had intended to make Singapore (Malaya) the key to defending their interests in the Far East, but they had not been able to provide adequate military or naval forces for its protection. Once World War II began, British efforts in the Mediterranean and the Middle East deprived their Pacific forces of support. When the Japanese attacked the British colonies in December 1941, the British could resist only feebly. Hong Kong and British Borneo fell almost immediately. On December 10, Japanese airplanes sank two of Britain's mightiest warships, the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse*, which were helpless without air cover. The Japanese then advanced through Malaya in a brilliant campaign that repeatedly outmaneuvered the British. In February 1942, Singapore fell, and eighty thousand troops surrendered—the greatest single defeat in British military history.

Still the Japanese advanced. In Burma, the British resisted until May 1942 and then retreated into India, which now stood in peril of Japanese invasion. The Japanese took the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines and advanced against Ceylon and Australia. A small British naval force fended them off from Ceylon, but the Japanese bombed the Australian town of Darwin. Only the American naval victory in the Coral Sea in May 1942 halted the Japanese advance.

Unable to fight on every front at once, the British had no choice but to leave the war in the Pacific to the American navy for the time being. The chief British concerns were North Africa and the supply lines across the Atlantic. In both areas the war slowly began to turn in favor of the British in late 1942 and early 1943. In North Africa, the British Eighth Army in June 1942 barely held off a German offensive at El Alamein, only sixty miles from Alexandria and the Canal. Churchill was eager for the Eighth Army to take the offensive, and when his generals did not respond to his prodding, he replaced them with the team that was to be successful during the rest of the war: General Harold Alexander as supreme commander of the Middle Eastern theater, and General Bernard Montgomery as commander of the Eighth Army. Abrasive, egotistical, and self-confident to the point of arrogance, Montgomery was also a superbly methodical planner and a master of set-piece battles. In October 1942, after careful preparation, Montgomery launched his offensive at the second Battle of El Alamein. It was a great success, the first major British triumph in the war, and pushed the Germans out of Libya into Tunisia.

Victory bells rang out all over Britain. In November of 1942, combined British and American forces landed in Morocco and Algeria. The German forces were eventually trapped between the Allies advancing from the west and the Eighth Army from the east. About one hundred thousand worn-out German and Italian soldiers were forced to surrender in May 1943; North Africa—and the vital Suez Canal and Middle Eastern oil supplies—were safe for the duration.

The Battle of the Atlantic was less dramatic than the events in North Africa, but probably more important. The German undersea fleet wreaked havoc on British shipping from 1940 through 1942. In April 1941, for instance, German U-boats sank almost seven hundred thousand tons, which was more than the British could replace in a month. In 1942, an increase in the number of German U-boats made British attempts to supply the Soviet Union through the North Atlantic and the Arctic Ocean almost impossible. One convoy to the Russian port of Archangel lost twenty-four of forty ships.

By March 1943, the British and Americans had nearly lost the battle. But the introduction of two new antisubmarine devices—"huff-duff" (high-frequency direction finding) and small-scale radar (for use in airplanes and small warships)—made all the difference. In May 1943 the rate of submarine losses forced the Germans to suspend the U-boat campaign. The Battle of the Atlantic had at last been won by the Allies.

The most important turn of all came in the Soviet Union. The struggle there between the Wehrmacht and the Red Army was the biggest and costliest military conflict in human history. The Russians throughout faced about three-quarters of the total German army. But the Germans never were able to capture the major Russian cities, Leningrad, Moscow, and Stalingrad. The struggle for Stalingrad was the decisive battle of the war. By November 1942 the Germans were laying siege to the city. A battle of attrition even more brutal than Verdun ensued. Toward the end of November, the Russians finally broke through the German lines above and below the city and encircled the attacking German army. In January 1943, the entire German Sixth Army surrendered. Although heavy fighting in Russia and Eastern Europe still lay ahead, the invincibility of the German army was broken. The tide of war had swung in favor of the Allies. Hitler told one of his generals, "The God of War has gone over to the other side."

THE WAR AT HOME

Even more than the Great War, the Second World War was a total war. It is safe to say that, in one way or another, all of the British people became involved. Civilian casualties were high; indeed, until late in 1941 more British civilians than military personnel died from enemy action. As a result, there was nothing like the split that opened during the First World War between those who served at the front and those who stayed home. Everyone was seen as pulling his or her weight and as sharing the misery caused by German arms. Few Britons opposed the war; the vast majority regarded it as a just conflict. Some sixty thousand men and twelve hundred women did register as conscientious objectors, but they were pacifists and did not represent an alienated intelligentsia. The high degree of participation in the war eventually produced a strong sense of unity and a consensus favoring social reform.

The blitz was the strongest unifier of all. Its worst period was from September 1940 through the summer of 1941, but German air raids went on

throughout the war. In 1944, just when the British began to think they might be free from skyborne terror, the Germans launched pilotless rockets on Britain—the V1 “buzz bombs” or “doodlebugs” and the V2 ballistic missiles. Altogether, the Germans dropped more than seventy-four thousand tons of bombs on Britain, or about 3.5 pounds per person. The British suffered about three hundred thousand civilian casualties. About two out of every seven houses were destroyed and two of every ten schools.

Yet, although prewar experts had predicted that bombing would shatter the morale of any civilian population, German bombing did no such thing. People did feel stark terror, and the repeated nightly raids and scurrying to bomb shelters, back garden dugouts, or the tube stations deprived people of sleep. Every minute spent under the rain of bombs, especially in the claustrophobic *Andersons*, steel-framed family shelters measuring 6 ft x 6 ft x 4.5 ft, seemed endless. Nevertheless, statistics showed that civilian mental disorder and drunkenness decreased, and people willingly worked long hours and increased their productivity. People from all social classes shared bomb shelters, including the London tube stations. Thousands of civilians volunteered as air raid wardens and fire spotters. Both factories that had been hit and shops in bombed districts took pride in prompt reopening, often with a kind of gallows humor: “More open than usual” was a common sign on shops that had lost their windows.

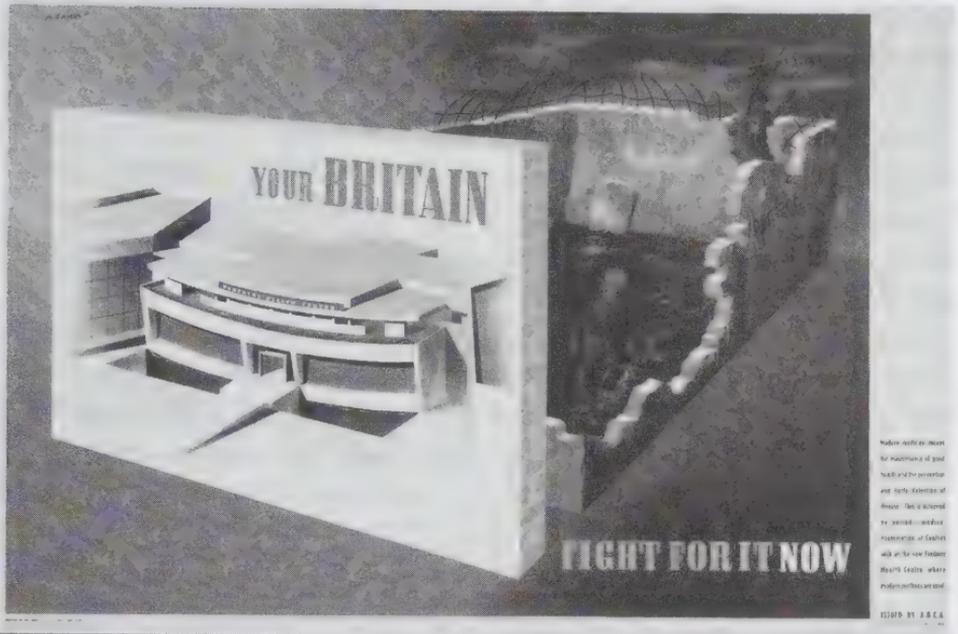
The experience of sharing the misery created a spirit of social unity. One observer wrote, “It is hard to persist in looking down upon, or resenting, a man who night after night is sharing the same dangers and doing exactly the same work as yourself.” People in public became noticeably friendlier, and queuing became more courteous as rationing and shortages were shared equally. Although there was at first some resentment among the East Enders of London, whose neighborhoods initially received the heaviest bombing, many older men and women for decades afterwards remembered the war years as a time of exceptional decline in class antagonism. Evacuation of children from the inner cities had the same effect. In the first days of the war, more than 40 percent of all British children were removed from the cities to safety in the countryside. Many of them returned to their homes in subsequent weeks, but moved out again during the blitz. Many middle- and upper-class folks had never had close contact with urban working people, and some were repelled by the appearance and manners of the working-class children. Others, however, were shocked into a resolve for social reform.

Another important experience shared by the British people was contact with American troops. From January 1942, when the first American units landed in Britain, through the massive buildup leading to the invasion of the Continent in mid-1944, American soldiers flooded into Britain. At one point, more than 1.5 million American soldiers and airmen were training in the English countryside, crowding the village pubs, and dominating the public places of London. They brought with them what was to the British lavish supplies of equipment, plus plenty of money to spend, cigarettes, candy bars, nylon stockings, American jazz, and other signs of the advanced civilization of the New World. It was not always easy for the more reserved Britons to accept the informal, garrulous, self-assertive style of the Yanks. Some Britons resented the fact that the American troops were popular with young British women. As the saying went, many of the British thought that the trouble with the Americans was that they were “over-paid, over-sexed, and over here.” One British newspaper offered this helpful hint on understanding them:

... like all children, they are very sensitive. They mistake our British reticence and reserve for the cold shoulder and positive dislike. They come from a land where everybody knows everybody, and everybody entertains everybody at sight. The contrast makes us seem unfriendly.

As was the case in the 1914–18 war, the power of the British state expanded after 1939. An Emergency Powers Act was passed in 1939, and from 1941 the government took control over the economy. The government this time did not take ownership of coal mines and factories, but it directed production and distribution effectively through numerous controls and regulations, and by the adoption of Keynesian strategies for planning and finance. Government direction increased the land under cultivation by 50 percent. War output went up dramatically, and eventually about 45 percent of the work force was employed in production of war-related goods and services. All food except bread and potatoes was rationed, and people shared the shortages equally by means of a point system that allowed some choice among scarce items.

The government sponsored much scientific research, especially in electronics, aeronautical engineering, jet propulsion, medicine, and atomic energy. Some of the bigger projects proved to be beyond Britain's capacity once the basic discoveries had been made. For instance, some pharmaceuticals such as penicillin had to be developed in the United States, and the atomic bomb also became an American project even though it began in Britain. All of this huge growth of governmental activity was paid for by a



Your Britain—Fight For It Now, (c. 1943). This propaganda poster sought to buttress public morale by promising that wartime sacrifices would result in a better Britain. The image of a new, modern building complex (the Finsbury Health Centre) supersedes a ruined house, with the word disease written on the far wall and a sickly child playing in a puddle on the ground.

combination of taxes (55 percent) and loans (45 percent). Inevitably taxes went up steeply: the standard rate of the income tax reached 50 percent and the top rate 97.5 percent.

The government mobilized almost the entire population over age eighteen. Conscription began in June 1939, this time with little dissent. Even women were conscripted, but they had a choice of the women's branches of the armed forces, civilian defense, or war work. Women returned to industry in large numbers, accounting for 34 percent of all workers in engineering and 62 percent in commerce. The Ministry of Labour had the power to draft workers into any industry, but rarely had to use it. The minister of labour, Ernest Bevin, was very successful in winning the cooperation of the trade unions, and thus compulsion was not necessary. Full employment became a reality, for war mobilization eradicated the twenty-year-old problem of insufficient work. Trade union membership climbed once again, from six million in 1939 to eight million in 1945. Because of the high demand for labor, wages went up by 80 percent during the war, whereas prices increased by only 31 percent. By 1945, real wages were up 50 percent over 1938.

In addition to directing the nation's economy, the wartime government also took at least partial control of its cultural output. In 1940, Churchill's government established CEMA—the Council for Education in Music and the Arts. Total war might seem the worst possible time for cultural advance, but CEMA was the first effort by a British government to promote high culture—classical music, theater, and painting—directly to the populace at large. Set up in 1940, CEMA took high-quality concerts, ballets, plays, and art exhibitions to the provinces. The popular response, especially to the music, was very positive, and CEMA subsidized five major symphony orchestras. According to one observer, “Despite the blackout and general war-weariness, music has had in this country an extraordinary flowering.” Celebration of the best of human culture seemed an appropriate answer to German barbarism, and CEMA made the privations of wartime a little easier to bear.

As early as 1941, the high level of popular participation in the war effort, as well as the people's fortitude under the bombing, rationing, and shortages, began to inspire a strong feeling in favor of social reconstruction. The growth of the state made government planning and direction seem the obvious road for this social improvement. The Churchill government itself spoke of postwar social reconstruction as a way of showing the British public that the war was worth fighting. Members of all parties shared this sentiment, though Labour was the most outspoken. The most important result of this consensus was the appointment of an interdepartmental committee of civil servants chaired by William Beveridge (1879–1963), a long-time civil servant and social reformer of the pre-1914 New Liberal variety. The Beveridge Report, *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, published in December 1942, set the agenda for social reconstruction for the next decade.

The Beveridge Report was not a revolutionary document, but it caught the imagination of the British public. More than six hundred thousand of its various editions were sold in the first year. Beveridge called for extension and coordination of the British social services, which had been founded before 1914 and strengthened between 1919 and 1939, so that they would form a single comprehensive system. His principles were (1) financing of social services through insurance contributions by employers, employees, and the state; (2) a standard rate of contributions and benefits that would apply to all social classes, not just the poor; and (3) a minimum subsistence for all, based on full employment, social security, family allowances, and a national health service. The public quickly embraced the plan as the minimum acceptable program. The Labour party promptly endorsed it.

Churchill and some Conservatives, however, showed tepid interest at best. Churchill did not wish to rouse people's commitment to a plan that he feared could not be paid for, and he did not want to divert public attention from the war effort. The *Manchester Guardian* summarized his views as: "Eager reformers are asked to pipe down and trust the government." This was somewhat unfair, for in 1943 the government itself issued a series of White Papers endorsing the gist of many of Beveridge's proposals, though with some reservations. In 1944, the government committed itself to maintaining full employment. In that same year, R. A. Butler, Conservative minister for education, passed a major educational reform act (for details, see chapter 28). Nevertheless, the public perceived Churchill's response to the Beveridge Report as lukewarm—and this perception determined the course of British postwar politics.

VICTORY, JANUARY 1943 TO AUGUST 1945

As American power built up at an accelerating pace, the likelihood of victory over Germany and Japan increased, but the role of Britain inevitably declined. Churchill continued to act as one of the Big Three with Roosevelt and Stalin, but increasingly he became a junior partner to the American president. Churchill's advice and counsel, which were based on more international experience than Roosevelt could summon, often proved invaluable, yet gradually the American view of grand strategy came to govern the Allies' decisions. The partnership of Britain with the United States and the Soviet Union did finally bring complete victory, but one tainted by political setbacks from Britain's point of view in both Europe and the Pacific.

Once victory in North Africa was assured, Britain and the United States had to decide what steps to take next. Throughout the second half of 1942, the British and Americans debated the issue. The Soviets naturally wanted the Western Allies to open a second front in France as soon as possible in order to drain off some of the terrible German pressure on the Red Army. The Americans, who were inclined to think in purely military terms, wanted to open a second front by means of a cross-channel invasion of France. They believed the military doctrine that the quickest way to victory was to close with the enemy's strongest forces and destroy them. Churchill and his generals, however, remembered the awful bloodletting of the First World War and Dunkirk as well. They preferred to attack on the periphery of Europe, on Germany's so-called soft underbelly, in Italy or the Balkans. Stalin later came to think that Churchill was stalling in order to let the Germans and

Soviets exhaust themselves against each other, but there is no evidence for this hypothesis. Churchill and his military advisers simply had grave doubts about the success of a frontal assault on the German forces, and they faced enormous logistical problems besides. Churchill's chief of the imperial general staff, Sir Alan Brooke (1883–1963), insisted that Italy be the next target. He got his way, and at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, Churchill and Roosevelt decided on a landing in Sicily. This required postponement of a cross-channel invasion until 1944. Stalin was furious.

British and American forces landed in Sicily in July 1943, with General Alexander in command of the Allied forces. Sicily fell in slightly over a month. In early September the British and American forces crossed the Straits of Messina from Sicily into Italy. Already Mussolini had fallen, and on September 8, Italy surrendered. Germany, however, decided to defend Italy mile by mile, and the Allied supreme command withdrew some forces from Italy to Britain in order to begin preparing for the invasion of France. As a result, the joint British-American campaign found the going in Italy extremely tough. The Allies did not take Rome until June 1944 or clear Italy of German forces until the end of the war in Europe in May 1945. Throughout, the British Eighth Army fought with distinction. However, the overall value of the Italian campaign has always been questioned, for the Allies had to commit thirty divisions to the struggle, compared to only twenty-two for the Germans. The best that can be said for the Italian campaign is that to some degree it kept the Germans from strengthening their forces in France.

Churchill and Brooke continued to seek alternative strategies to a cross-channel invasion in 1943–44. Churchill wanted to conduct a Mediterranean campaign, which could be built on British holdings at Gibraltar, Egypt, and Malta and which would shore up British power in the Middle East, increasingly important to Britain because of its oil reserves. He also had in mind a Balkan campaign, which would hit the Germans where they were weakest, and in 1944 he even considered an invasion of Austria and Hungary through the Adriatic. This would have the extra benefit of preempting Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe. The British acted on their strategic preferences by aiding the Yugoslav partisans led by Marshal Tito, against the wishes of both Roosevelt and Stalin. The later independence of communist Yugoslavia from Soviet hegemony owed much to Britain.

The British, moreover, continued to invest heavily in the bombing of Germany. This RAF offensive remains one of the most controversial aspects of Britain's war effort, in terms of both its effectiveness and its morality. The chief of Bomber Command, Sir Arthur Harris, believed that Germany could

be defeated by *area bombing*, which amounted to indiscriminate bombing of German cities. Although a few critics such as Bishop George Bell openly condemned the policy, Churchill himself approved it. Despite serious losses of bombers and aircrews, Harris went ahead with the raids, some of which involved more than one thousand heavy bombers. In some instances, Bomber Command deliberately caused fire storms by means of incendiary bombs. Thus, the RAF destroyed Hamburg in the summer of 1943 and Dresden in February of 1945, killing in the latter case 135,000 people. The German cities were not defenseless, for night-fighters took a fearful toll on British bombers. In the winter of 1943–44 it appeared that the RAF had lost the battle over Germany. But the introduction into the American air force of a long-range fighter plane that flew its missions in daylight gave the Allies control over German air space. By mid-1944, the British and American air forces had created a severe oil shortage in Germany, and the RAF was making German troop movements in France nearly impossible. In these ways, the RAF ultimately contributed to the final Allied victory, though at a terrible price.

Meanwhile, at the Teheran Conference in November 1943, Roosevelt and Stalin pushed Churchill and Brooke into agreeing on a cross-channel invasion. Preparations on a colossal scale went forward in England. The command of Operation Overlord, the invasion of Normandy, went to American general Dwight Eisenhower, in recognition that the Americans would dominate the campaign on the Continent in both men and munitions. Sir Arthur Tedder of the RAF served as his deputy and General Montgomery as the commander of land forces in the invasion itself. All of southern England in early 1944 became a huge base and depot for the invasion troops: 3.5 million men, plus 6,800 ships and landing craft and 13,000 airplanes. The Allies took pains to deceive the Germans into thinking that the initial landing would come at Calais, whereas in actuality it was planned for Normandy, directly south across the English Channel from Plymouth. On invasion day (called D-Day, June 6, 1944) five divisions went ashore—two American, two British, and one Canadian. The British and Canadians had been assigned the task of tying down the bulk of the German defenders. Hence, they made slow progress and were able to take their main early objective, Caen, only after a month of severe combat. The invasion, nevertheless, was a success, and gradually the giant army gathered in England was sent across.

The Germans did not give up France without a desperate struggle. But the Americans broke out of the German defensive ring in Normandy in July and poured south and east through France. They retook Paris in August.

British forces on the Allied left wing took Belgium and much of the Netherlands, where German resistance stiffened. The Germans launched a last-gasp counteroffensive in the Ardennes forest in December, in hopes of splitting the British from the Americans. The Americans contained the attack, however, and by the beginning of 1945 the Allied offensive was rolling back the Germans all along the front. Montgomery pushed for a single concentrated attack in the north, whereas Eisenhower insisted on moving forward at all points at once; the merits of the two tactics are still debated today. In any case, the British and Americans in March 1945 crossed the Rhine into Germany. The Soviets, meanwhile, pushed their way through Poland and Eastern Europe into Germany. Clearly, the end was near.

The time for postwar planning had come, and the grand alliance was beginning to show signs of stress. Stalin was determined to arrange a settlement of central and Eastern Europe that would secure the Soviet Union from any further threat from Germany. The Western Allies for their part did not want to see any spread of communism into Europe, and Roosevelt in particular clung to Wilsonian ideals of democracy and national self-determination. Poland was a particular bone of contention, for hostility between the Poles and Russians was many centuries old, and rival Polish governments in exile existed in both Britain and the Soviet Union. Churchill wanted to keep the Soviets out of the Mediterranean and to secure British influence there and in the Balkans. He was more willing than Roosevelt to engage in old-fashioned power politics, whereas the American president favored the establishment of an organization of international cooperation. In October 1944, in a meeting with Stalin in Moscow, Churchill agreed that Russian influence would predominate in Rumania, Bulgaria, and Hungary; that British influence would predominate in Greece; and that the two powers would share influence in Yugoslavia. Churchill expected as a matter of course that Britain would remain the paramount power in the Middle East. Early in 1945, Churchill urged Eisenhower to push as far into Eastern Europe as possible in order for the Western Allies to have some bargaining power with the Soviets, but the Americans preferred not to mix politics with military decisions.

This was the situation when the Big Three met at Yalta (in the Crimea) in February 1945. Poland and Germany were the main issues, and neither was settled satisfactorily. The brute fact was that the Red Army occupied Poland, and the Americans and British had no power over its fate. Stalin would have been pleased to strip Germany of its industry to render it incapable of ever posing a military threat to the Soviet Union again, and to collect payment as far as possible for damages the Germans had done to west-



The Big Three: *Prime Minister Winston Churchill, President Franklin Roosevelt, and Premier Joseph Stalin at Yalta, February 1945.*

ern Russia. Churchill accepted the idea of German reparations, but he did not wish to render the Germans incapable of supporting themselves; otherwise, the beleaguered British would have to support a starving German populace in the region occupied by the British army. Churchill was more concerned with obtaining an occupation zone for the French, not out of generosity or because he liked the prickly leader of the revived French forces, General Charles de Gaulle, but because Churchill now feared the withdrawal of the United States from Europe. This he got. In general, however, Britain simply did not punch at the same weight as the United States and the Soviet Union.

Churchill at Yalta still trusted Stalin to keep his commitments. But as the war drew toward a close, Churchill became more concerned about Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. When the war in Europe ended with the suicide of Hitler and the surrender of Germany in May 1945, there was jubilation in Britain, but Churchill was already writing the Americans about the appearance of an “iron curtain” dividing the Russian sphere of Europe from Western Europe.

The war dragged on through the summer in the Pacific. The British effort there had largely been restricted to India and Burma since 1942. Indian nationalism proved to be a severe trial for Britain during the war. The British

viceroys in 1939 had simply declared that India was at war with Germany without consulting Indian leaders. The Indian army responded loyally, contributing 2.5 million men to the war effort, but nationalist opinion was decidedly negative. The Indian National Congress did not admire the Germans or Japanese, but they thought that India ought to be given responsible self-government before India supported Britain. Indian provincial ministers resigned in protest, riots broke out, and Gandhi led another civil disobedience campaign until British authorities imprisoned him. Some forty thousand defectors joined an Indian National Army to fight on the Japanese side. In 1942, fearing that the end of British rule in India was near, the British cabinet sent the left-wing Labourite Sir Stafford Cripps to negotiate with the Indian nationalists. Cripps promised Indian self-rule after the war. The nationalists, who wanted the British to quit India immediately, refused the offer. Gandhi called it “a post-dated cheque drawn on a crashing bank.” Only the revival of American and British military fortunes in the Pacific theater after 1943 enabled the British to maintain the status quo in India—temporarily.

In Burma, the British army and the Indian army scored a major victory over the Japanese. The Anglo-Indian forces, commanded by General William Slim, recovered from the losses of 1941–42, defended northeast India from invasion in a desperate struggle, and then fought a brilliant campaign under the most difficult jungle and mountain conditions to retake Burma. The British soldiers in Burma thought that they had been forgotten by the public at home, but they completed their reconquest of Burma at almost the same time as the victory over Germany in May 1945. The British began to plan for the recapture of Malaya, but the Japanese, reeling from one American blow after another and suffering from a massive bombing campaign including the use of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, surrendered in August 1945.

COUNTING THE COSTS

In the third century BC, King Pyrrhus of Epirus scored a victory over the Romans that was so costly that he said another victory like it would destroy his kingdom. The British could have said the same for the Second World War. They emerged from the war victorious, or at least on the winning side, having fought for more than six years, and they appeared in some respects to be a great power still. But it was in some ways a Pyrrhic victory. The costs were enormous. Some three hundred thousand British service-

men were killed, less than half the 1914–18 total. But sixty thousand civilians and thirty-five thousand merchant seamen, plus two hundred thousand British Empire troops, also lost their lives. In addition, the British lost, as we have seen, a great many buildings to German bombs, including 20 percent of all schools. One estimate is that overall the British lost or used up about 10 percent of their total national wealth.

Terrible as these figures are, they show only the visible losses. To finance the purchase of munitions, the British sold off almost all of their overseas investments (about £1.5 billion), and they used up about two-thirds of their gold reserves. These developments posed a threat to Britain's position in the world economy. Income from foreign investments was crucial in making up the gap between imports and exports, and the gold reserves backed the huge volume of sterling currency held by the dominions and other countries in the sterling area (those countries, mainly within the British Empire and Commonwealth, that pegged their currencies to the pound sterling). To add to these difficulties, throughout the war domestic industry had been run down, and exports in 1945 stood at less than one-third of the 1939 level. And of course the British borrowed heavily during the war, so that the national debt had grown by about 700 percent. With enormous needs for reconstruction, the British would have to borrow even more from abroad, yet the United States ended Lend-Lease immediately on Japan's surrender. Britain now stood as the major debtor nation in the world, with heavy obligations to countries in the sterling area and with seriously reduced means of earning the necessary money.

The war had shown clearly that the British economy would not be able to sustain Britain's position as one of the three or four great world powers. By 1943, for example, both the Germans and the Soviets were spending almost 25 percent more on armaments than the British, and the Americans were spending more than three times as much as the British without really straining. The British industrial sector, highly mobilized for war, reached its peak in 1942–43, but by 1944 American war production was already 600 percent higher. The result of Britain's dependency on the United States was obvious in terms of British status as a great power, as Churchill noted at Teheran in 1943:

I realised at Teheran for the first time what a small nation we are. There I sat with the great Russian bear on one side of me, with paws outstretched, and on the other side the great American buffalo, and between the two sat the poor little English donkey who was the only one of the three, who knew the right way home.

To be sure, the British Empire was restored in 1945, but it was restored largely because of the efforts of the Soviet Union and the United States, neither of whom approved of it. The war frayed the delicate bonds that held the Empire together. The loss of the Pacific colonies, especially the supposedly mighty Singapore base, to the Japanese in 1941–42 was a psychological blow to Britain and a lift for colonial nationalists in Africa, Asia, and the Western Hemisphere. Australia and New Zealand recognized that their survival depended on themselves and the Americans, not the British. Moreover, Britain had to make promises of self-government or new constitutions all around the Empire: in India, of course, but also in the Gold Coast (Ghana), Nigeria, Kenya, Ceylon, Malta, Jamaica, Trinidad, and British Guiana. The new United Nations and the American policy of global free trade would alike present problems for the unity and effectiveness of the Empire. As Churchill said in December 1941, the British Empire would survive, but it survived radically transformed.

The survival of Britain itself and the defeat of fascism, Nazism, and Japanese militarism were the great positive achievements of the war. They were in fact Britain's only war aims. In addition, the war stimulated the growth and technological advance of newer industries such as aircraft, motor vehicles, electronics, and chemicals. Agriculture grew because of both intensive mechanization and improved fertilization. Moreover, the wartime economy raised average real wages and set the stage for major improvements in the standard of living. The war stimulated feelings of social solidarity, revealed weaknesses in the social system, and encouraged the desire for social improvement. Furthermore, the war showed that state intervention and regulation could bring about positive changes. It led the British to accept Keynesian economics all at once. Most of these trends toward a welfare state were already evident before 1939, but World War II accelerated them. All in all, it was an impressive achievement by the British and in sum made for their finest hour.

Churchill never had any doubt that the British war aims were worth the cost of total effort and the expenditure of practically every last farthing. Perhaps a more cold-blooded calculation might have led the British to settle with Hitler after the fall of France, in hopes of saving the resources of Britain and the Empire while Germany and the Soviet Union drained themselves of lifeblood in their titanic struggle for Central and Eastern Europe. It is difficult to imagine, however, that the British could have remained aloof from the conflict permanently or that any decent nation could have tolerated the insane brutality and anti-Semitism of the Nazi regime. In any case,

the Japanese attack on the British Empire in the Pacific would have involved Britain in a world war whatever the situation in Europe, and that war would have led to British dependency on the United States. Under the circumstances, Churchill made the right basic decisions, and his inspirational leadership of the nation in the darkest moments must rank as one of the most heroic feats of courage and will in British history. If the British victory in the end was Pyrrhic, that was the consequence of factors beyond Churchill's, and Britain's, control.

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Part **VI**

**Britain in the
Postwar World**

1945–2014

Chapter 28

Welfare, Affluence, and Consensus: Culture and Society, 1945–1970

In the years between 1945 and 1970, three deeply interrelated themes stood out in British domestic history: (1) the creation of a welfare state built on a remarkable political consensus, (2) the shift from wartime austerity to the Age of Affluence, and (3) the relative decline of the British economy. What Professor Harold Perkin called “the double helix of British history”—the rising spiral of living standards and expectations for ordinary people intertwined with the descending spiral of Britain’s global economic dominance—aptly describes the story of these years. In the 1970s, observers focused on the downward spiral and frequently asked, what’s wrong with Britain? Yet the upward spiral begs the question what’s right with Britain? For on the whole, the British during postwar decades achieved a comparatively decent, civil, humane society. If their history in the thirty years after 1945 held warnings for other states, it also served as an admirable model.

BUILDING THE WELFARE STATE, 1945–1951

As the Second World War drew to a close, the British political parties began looking toward a fresh general election, the first since 1935. Labour was anxious to compete as an independent party, and many Conservatives wanted an early election in order to cash in on Churchill’s immense personal prestige. No one wanted to repeat the experience of the Lloyd George coalition after World War I. Churchill wanted to delay until the end of the war, but gave into pressure and set the election for July 1945. This decision was to have surprising consequences.

During the campaign, the Labour party exploited the popular belief that a Labour government would deal with peacetime issues better than the Conservatives. Public attention had shifted strongly to domestic concerns.

Labour candidates embraced the Beveridge Report, particularly its pledge to use state action to ensure full employment, whereas Conservatives were more cautious in their promises. Labour meanwhile benefited from the participation of men such as Attlee and Bevin in the wartime coalition and from the growth of the trade unions to more than eight million members. Churchill did not help his party's electoral chances when in a radio broadcast he said that a Labour government would introduce something like the Gestapo into Britain. He made funny remarks about the modest Attlee (whom he called "a sheep in sheep's clothing"), and these did not sit well with an electorate that appreciated Attlee's role in the war coalition.

The British public profoundly admired Churchill's wartime leadership, but they separated that genuine emotion from their sense of political interests. Most of the voters wanted to correct the ills of the 1930s by means of programs and planning conceived during the war. Thus Labour won a major victory in the election, with 393 seats to 210 Conservatives and only 12 Liberals. Labour won not only the great majority of working-class votes, but also about a third of those cast by the middle class.

The Labour party that came into office in 1945 was strongly reformist but not revolutionary. The party had been founded as a nonrevolutionary alliance of trades unionists and democratic socialists. Its most fervent element, the Independent Labour party (ILP), was an undogmatic collection of ethical socialists. Its principal theorists, the Fabians, were gradualist utilitarians. Its main electoral force, trade unionism, was essentially devoted to defending the position of working people within the capitalist system. The cabinet formed in 1945 was led by men who had learned their politics during the early years of the century: Clement Attlee, the prime minister, an uncharismatic but efficient chairman; Ernest Bevin, foreign secretary, an aggressive personality who had made his name largely as a trade union leader and spokesman; Herbert Morrison (1888–1965), lord president of the council, long prominent in local government and in effect a British-style political boss; and Aneurin Bevan (1897–1960), minister of health, former coal miner, and the only representative of the party's left wing. All of these men had powerful memories of the 1930s and were determined to prevent a repeat of its poverty and unemployment.

The Attlee government's years in office from 1945 to 1951 formed one of the most productive legislative periods in British history. In six busy years, the Labour government established the superstructure of the welfare state, which in modified form remained in place into the twenty-first century. It also committed itself to maintaining full employment through the

nationalization of major industries and the adoption of Keynes's ideas of demand management. In implementing these measures, Attlee's government sought not to revolutionize British society, but rather to guarantee that henceforth no one would fall below a minimum standard of living and that everyone would have equality of opportunity. As we have seen, these goals arose from a consensus that began building in the 1930s and reached maturity during the war.

When the Labour government took office in mid-1945, however, it faced a financial crisis serious enough to threaten to derail any plans for postwar reconstruction. As soon as the Pacific war ended, the United States ended Lend-Lease and demanded immediate repayment of its massive loans. With British industry in disarray and the country deeply in debt, the British desperately needed help. Attlee sent Keynes (who had served as economic advisor to the coalition government throughout the war) to the United States to seek a grant or loan in the fall of 1945.

Keynes found that the Americans drove a hard bargain; the British had to settle for a \$3.75 billion loan, repayable at 2 percent over fifty years. Moreover, the British had to agree to give up their imperial trade arrangements in favor of multilateral free trade and to allow sterling to be freely convertible (that is, exchangeable) into gold and other currencies in 1947. The American loan received strong criticism from both the extreme left and the extreme right in Britain, and the convertibility provision, as we will see, caused severe hardship. But in the short run the loan enabled the British economy to begin to rebuild, employment to rise, and the Labour government to construct the welfare system.

The government's objective in its social legislation was to provide a *universal* system of social services for all British citizens "from the cradle to the grave." The system would equalize opportunity on the one hand and assist with social problems such as illness and old age on the other. The government would not prohibit individuals from buying services such as insurance and schooling privately, but the state's social services were to be as good as money could buy, so that wealth would no longer command superior social security. That the government fell short of these noble goals should not be surprising; what is surprising is how close to the target it came.

The welfare legislation had four major elements: (1) comprehensive social insurance, (2) a national health service, (3) state-supported housing construction, and (4) public education. The principal legislation for social security (old age and unemployment benefits) was the National Insurance Act of 1946, which established a contributory system whereby people paid a

flat rate to buy insurance against those times when they could not work. The National Assistance Act of 1948 completed the system by including those who somehow did not qualify for social insurance. The system in theory assured a minimum standard of living for all citizens, although, in the inevitable race between rising prices and benefits rates, benefits usually fell behind.

All parties supported the National Insurance Act. Such was not the case with the National Health Service (NHS), although in the end it proved the most popular part of the Labour party's program. Health insurance in Britain dates from Lloyd George's National Insurance Act of 1911; during World War II, the Emergency Medical Services of World War II greatly expanded public health services. Still, in 1945 health insurance covered only about half of the population and did not extend to either hospitals or specialists. Doctors and hospitals tended to cluster in the prosperous South and Southeast of England. Hospitals—labeled voluntary (that is, independent) or local authority (funded and run by local governments)—varied widely in quality. The rich had access to much better medical care than the poor.

Bevan, the Labour minister of health, declared that the British deserved better. Determined to establish a medical system that obliterated the distinction between rich and poor, he resolutely rejected the idea of a public medical service open only to people with incomes below a certain level. "The essence of the satisfactory health service," he declared, "is that the rich and poor are treated alike, that poverty is not a disability and wealth is not an advantage." His solution, embodied in the National Health Act of 1946, was to nationalize the hospitals, organize them around twenty regional schools of medicine, and establish a national doctors' service. Within the NHS, every British citizen had the right to free medical care, either from a physician or in a hospital if necessary. Doctors could join the NHS or not as they pleased; those who did were paid a basic salary plus a capitation fee for each patient on their lists. A doctor joining the NHS could also maintain a private practice if he or she desired. Patients remained free to choose the doctor they preferred, but through incentives the government distributed doctors more evenly around the country.

The Conservative party resisted nationalization of the hospitals, and the British Medical Association (BMA) feared that doctors would lose their independence and their personal relations with their patients. Bevan prevailed, however, and launched the NHS in 1948. Most doctors joined, and by 1950, 97 percent of the population registered as patients. People flocked to their doctors' offices, many seeking eyeglasses and dentures they had never been



Labour Minister of Health Aneurin Bevan greets a patient at the opening of a new hospital, c. 1948. Improving access to hospital care was a key component of the new National Health Service.

able to afford. Within a decade, the number of hospital patients had risen by 30 percent. The cost of the NHS rose faster than Bevan or anyone had expected; in the early 1950s, then, small charges had to be set for eyeglasses and prescriptions. In general, however, the principle of free and high-quality health care to all who need it remained (and remains) intact. The boldest achievement of the British welfare state, the NHS, quickly became the one that the populace would least readily give up.

But it was housing rather than health care that the British people wanted most urgently in 1945. Churchill's government had forecasted a long-term need for three to four million new houses. The Labour government simply was not able to provide funds for new housing on that scale, but it made a start. The responsible minister, Bevan again, elected to work through state subsidies to local authorities, leaving it to them to contract for new construction. Between 1945 and 1951, 1.5 million new houses were built, but because of the population increase and the formation of new households (both the result of a postwar baby boom), the demand for new houses ran ahead of the ability to build them; thus, the need for houses was as great in 1951 as it had been in 1945.

In regard to education, the main legislation, Butler's Education Act of 1944, had been passed before Labour came into office. Labour's job was to implement it. The act of 1944 provided for secondary education for all to the age of fifteen—a great step, though probably seventy-five years overdue. As implemented, the secondary education requirement meant that all schoolchildren had to take an examination at age eleven (the dreaded “11-plus”), which determined whether they would be placed in a college-prep type high school (the grammar schools), a technical high school (few of which were actually provided), or the ordinary high school leading to employment (the “secondary modern” schools). Labourites hoped that this tripartite system would democratize British education and replace hierarchies of wealth and power with a meritocracy. It did not work out that way.

Middle-class children on the whole did better than working-class children, who came from families that normally did not cultivate academic achievement. Butler's Education Act left the elite public schools untouched, and the Labour government—chockablock with ex-public school boys such as Attlee—did not have the nerve to attack them. Thus, the new educational structure, which existed until the 1970s, increased social mobility for some working-class children, but not as many as expected; on the whole, it helped preserve the class system.

At the same time, the British university system remained relatively small. During the 1950s, the state increased its funding to the universities, so that in 1957 nearly 70 percent of university funds came from the government, and 75 percent of all university students held public grants paying for both their fees and their maintenance (room and board). That support made it possible for a British student to go to any university to which he or she was admitted. The number of spaces available, however, was very small. In the 1950s and 1960s, the number of universities in Britain did grow from seventeen to forty-four, as the new “plateglass” universities such as Sussex, Essex, and Lancaster were built and certain technical colleges were raised to university status. The number of full-time students increased from 83,000 to more than 200,000 in 1968 (and to 460,000 in the 1970s). Yet until the 1990s the proportion of the British population of college age who attended a university never went above about 8 percent, an attendance level below that of European countries and far below that of the United States. The British university system in the welfare state was less elitist than in the nineteenth or early twentieth century, but it remained closed to the bulk of the population.

The welfare state thus fell short of creating a classless society. Yet the Labour party's record in social legislation was very impressive, and its supporters greeted it with idealism and hope. Critics on the far left argued that the welfare state only made an unjust capitalist system more palatable, whereas critics on the right contended that it was too expensive and too corrosive of the necessary disciplines of work and thrift. But on the whole, most Britons in the 1950s and into the 1960s saw the welfare state as a crucial component of a just society and as the right response to the problems of the interwar years and the challenges of total war.

Most Labourites believed, however, that social welfare ultimately depended on full employment, and that the government's main task in the postwar era was to ensure that the trauma of interwar unemployment never again ravaged British society. Thus, the Labour party in 1945 set a high priority on the nationalization of certain industries. They reasoned that nationalization would enable the state to run these industries more efficiently than private enterprise, provide more ample capital investment, manage the industries for the benefit of society rather than for the profit of the capitalist, improve industrial relations—and maintain full employment. Control over “the commanding heights of the economy” would, they argued, enable the state to plan and direct the economy as a whole.

Several industries, including the Central Electricity Board and British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC), had been nationalized before 1940. Now, in 1945, the Labour party nationalized the coal mines (1947), the railways (1947), trucking (1947), and electrical and gas distribution (1948). The iron and steel industry was nationalized after much controversy in 1949; it was the only industry that was fairly healthy at the time. (It was denationalized, renationalized, and denationalized again in subsequent years.) The method of nationalization chosen in each case was the public corporation: the state bought out share owners and placed the nationalized industries under the control of appointed boards responsible to a government minister, who in turn was responsible to Parliament. The chair of the board in most cases, however, operated as an independent chief executive officer.

In general, nationalization brought about useful rationalization of industries, but it probably had minimal impact on employment rates and even less of an impact on industrial relations. Postwar Britain did have an employment rate close to 100 percent, but this was largely due to the general increase in demand for industrial and consumer goods and a serious shortage of labor. Meanwhile, in the nationalized industries, management

and workers remained remote from each other. The managerial force generally came from the ranks of the industries themselves; hence, to the workers, the bosses looked the same (and often *were* the same) as before. Few workers were appointed to the governing boards; anyone who was came to be regarded, as Attlee said, “as a boss’s man.”

In addition, three problems limited the impact of nationalization. First, the Labour government for the most part nationalized only the older, more troubled industries; these did not provide a means of directing the whole economy. Secondly, Britain was too strapped financially to provide the capital that these industries desperately needed; thus, they did not become paragons of productivity. Even in those British industries in which nationalization brought about increases in production, these increases did not match the growth rates of Western European rivals (many of which were also nationalized in the postwar era). Finally, it was never clear whether the principal objective of nationalization was greater efficiency or social service. Often the nationalized industries were run at a loss to keep prices and fares down or to keep staffing levels high. When the Conservatives sought to denationalize road haulage in 1953 and steel in 1954, there was no strong buyers’ demand for either.

FROM AUSTERITY TO AFFLUENCE, 1945–1970

Labour carried out its program of welfare and nationalization in conditions of extreme austerity. Bomb damage, run-down factories, used-up investments abroad, and foreign debt all made for grim times in which the privations and controls suffered by the people during the war had to be continued. Regulations requiring governmental permission or licenses controlled nearly every enterprise, from equipping a shop to purchasing a new bathroom sink. Food rationing actually increased beyond wartime levels, with bread placed on ration for the first time in 1946. Because popular demand for consumer goods was very high, the government had to keep taxes up in order to suppress inflation of prices. Further, because British exports had collapsed during the war, the nation faced a serious balance of payments problem. The Labour government gave high priority to building up the export industries and restricting imports, which tightened the noose on British consumption even more.

The winter of 1947–48 was particularly hard. An unusually harsh winter disrupted the transportation of key supplies and worsened Britain’s shortage of coal. People were cold and often had to scramble to find enough food.

Then came the devastating impact of the convertibility clause of the American loan: with the pound sterling freely convertible to dollars, sterling holders around the world hastened to rid themselves of the British currency. Britain teetered on the edge of bankruptcy, as interconnected balance of payments and sterling crises wracked the economy. Only the arrival from the United States of \$3.2 billion (more than any other nation received) in Marshall Plan aid saved Britain from further cuts in rations, high unemployment, and an end to the house construction program. Even so, some food-stuffs were rationed until 1954 and coal all the way until 1958—*thirteen years* after the end of war!

But gradually, economic conditions turned for the better. Labour's export campaign succeeded, especially in the automobile industry. Between 1946 and 1950, British exports rose by 77 percent. Bread was de-rationed in 1948, followed by flour, eggs, and soap in 1950. In 1951, in order to mark the end of austerity and to celebrate the hard-won accomplishments of the British people, the Labour government staged the Festival of Britain, with exhibition halls to display British products and the new Royal Festival Hall on the south bank of the Thames for concerts. Unlike the Crystal Palace exhibition of 1851, the Festival of Britain was not international, or even imperial, but purely British—a celebration of the material pleasures that the populace could soon hope to enjoy. In 1952, the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, who succeeded her father, George VI, likewise marked the beginning of a new, more affluent time. It even gave rise to talk of a New Elizabethan Age.

Marked by full employment, fairly strong economic growth, and a consumer boom, the period of postwar affluence lasted from the early 1950s until the early 1970s. Despite continuing popular fear that 1930s-level unemployment might reappear at any moment, the number of jobless people never rose above a million between 1945 and the early 1970s. So strong was employment that *full employment* came to be defined as an economy with only a 2-percent unemployment rate—a concept that was beyond the fondest hopes of interwar economists. The full employment of the 1950s and 1960s rested on three factors: (1) postwar rebuilding from wartime destruction and expansion of exports, (2) low interest rates inspired by Keynesian financial policies, and (3) the influence of the huge American economic expansion. As the American economy grew, it pulled much of the world economy with it. In Britain, full employment allowed wages to rise, and although wages pushed prices up with them, real earnings improved for Britons by 80 percent between 1950 and 1970.



The New Domesticity; the New Consumerism: *A happy housewife demonstrates the first British-made, partly automatic compact washing machine.*

The high rate of employment and increasing real wages together generated a long consumer boom—the most notable in British history up to that point. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan said in 1957, “Most of our people have never had it so good,” and he was right. Domestic demand soared for telephones, televisions, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, refrigerators, and the like. Installment buying (or buying on credit—which the British called “buying on the never never”) helped break down old standards of prudence and thrift. No doubt the welfare state enabled families to ignore saving for a rainy day. By the early 1970s, half of British households owned their own homes, half had cars, two-thirds had washing machines, three-fourths had refrigerators, and nine-tenths had televisions.

The booming domestic consumer market, plus considerable success in exports overseas, contributed to vigorous economic growth. The total of goods and services produced at home (the gross domestic product, or GDP) grew by an annual average of 2.7 percent in the 1950s and almost 3 percent in the 1960s, a better record for the British economy than at any time since the 1870s. New industries—automotive, electronics, aircraft, and industrial chemicals—carried the growth, while the old staples of coal, iron, textiles, and shipbuilding continued to decline.

Both the growth record and the new industries were encouraging, yet British growth was only mediocre compared to that in the United States, Western Europe, and Japan. In the 1950s and 1960s, for instance, British

output rose by about 60 percent, but that of West Germany shot up by 250 percent and Japan by 300 percent. The British share of world trade in manufactured goods fell from 22.8 percent in 1938, to 19.8 percent in 1955, and to 10.8 percent in 1970. British firms lost overseas markets to more efficient industrial powers and even began to be crowded out of significant sectors of the domestic market. In these facts and figures lay a crucial story for post-World War II Britain: British economic growth was good but not good enough.

The British Age of Affluence, therefore, involved not only social welfare, full employment, and a consumer boom, but also the short-term problem of chronic balance of payments crises and the long-term problem of inadequate productivity. These problems bedeviled both Conservative (1951–64) and Labour governments (1964–70) and grew to crisis proportions in the 1970s. Some detailed analysis is therefore necessary.

Given the Labour government's sensible decision after 1945 not to shut Britain off from the rest of the world and run a self-sufficient "fortress" economy, the British had to import large quantities of foodstuffs and raw materials every day. In addition, the demand for consumer goods—mainly American goods in the 1950s and 1960s, but increasingly European and Japanese—contributed mightily to the import bill. As in the nineteenth century, a combination of visible exports (manufactured goods, mostly) and invisible income paid for these imports. The British achievement in exporting manufactured goods between 1950 and 1970 was much better than between 1919 and 1939, but it could not pay the import bill on its own, and unfortunately, two world wars and the emergence of the United States as the world's financial power had radically reduced Britain's ability to earn invisible income (from foreign investments, brokerage of foreign trade, international insurance, shipping, and so on). Thus, from 1950 to 1970 the British economy experienced recurring shortfalls in the balance of payments.

Balance of payments deficits both aggravated and were aggravated by threats to the value of the pound sterling and by the efforts of the various governments to preserve the currency's value. Whenever the balance of payments fell into deficit, businessmen around the world found that they were accumulating excess pounds sterling whose value was being drained by inflation; naturally, then, these holders of sterling rushed to trade their pounds for gold or other currencies, normally the dollar. Because the British had created the sterling area in 1939, and now sustained it as a symbol of British power, many countries held vast quantities of sterling as reserves (backing) for their own currencies. Postwar British governments

felt responsible, therefore, to maintain the convertibility of sterling (the exchange rate) at a high value. But this decision meant that the price tag on British goods was higher than it should have been and so British exporters had trouble selling their goods abroad, which of course only worsened the balance of payments problem and made sterling crises even more inevitable.

Many economic historians argue that British governments in the 1950s and 1960s made matters worse by following what became known as the politics of *stop-go*. To encourage economic growth, governments eased import restrictions, provided cheap money for investments, and encouraged installment buying—the *go* phase of the cycle. But as the economy heated up, it increased inflation, sucked in imports, and created a balance of payments deficit. When balance of payments deficits reached crisis levels, the government of the moment had to clamp down on imports (i.e., dampen domestic demand) if it wanted to avoid having to devalue sterling—hence, the *stop* phase, characterized by tight money and controls on installment buying. Because it created an uncertain business environment, *stop-go* discouraged investment and long-range planning.

Stop-go, however, was not the underlying problem of the British economy. Inadequate industrial production was the fundamental long-term flaw. The explanations for this failure, or “British disease,” as it has been called, were (and remain) hotly controversial. The trade unions blamed incompetent management, and management in turn blamed the trade unions. Economists tended to cite purely economic factors, whereas social and cultural observers emphasized factors in British society beyond the market itself.

Four factors seem beyond dispute. First, we have already seen that Britain in the late nineteenth century grew more slowly than newly industrializing nations and that the British compensated with the Empire and invisible income. The two world wars, however, weakened Britain’s hold on its empire, injured British industrial capacity, and dealt a heavy blow to foreign trade and invisible income. Second, poor labor-management relations hampered British productivity and afflicted British industry through the 1980s.

These problems grew out of the long history of class conflict. Management and trade unionists viewed each other with suspicion and thus tended to escalate every dispute, no matter how trivial, into a battle in the class war. British executives tended to be dismissive of workers’ demands and to stand aloof from the workers. Heaven forbid that they eat in the workers’ canteens! The workers for their part assumed that company profits in some

vague way represented exploitation and displayed an *instrumental* attitude toward their work. Thus, they showed little company loyalty and regarded their jobs as a necessary evil for earning enough money to pay for consumer pleasures.

Moreover, the British trade union movement remained both highly bureaucratized and highly fragmented. Union officials often had little contact with and therefore control over their workers, who looked to shop stewards for leadership, and the multiplicity of unions within any one industry (or company) caused much scuffling among the unions for jurisdiction as well as hypersensitivity about gradations in pay. Also, the experience of unemployment in the 1930s scarred British trade unionists and British working-class culture in general. In the postwar period workers fought to keep personnel numbers high (overmanning and featherbedding, according to managers) and to retain absurdly restrictive job descriptions. This union restrictiveness, rooted in a tendency to look backward to the 1930s rather than to focus on present realities, often minimized the productive advantages of such investment as management attempted.

Little long-term investment in British industry was the third factor behind the British disease. Poor industrial relations and stop-go policy cycles were not the only reasons for low investment rates. Government research and development funds, which were ample, were directed largely toward military projects. The welfare state removed an incentive for private savings, and the population as a whole seemed to prefer social security and satisfaction of immediate consumer desires to investment for the future—a problem faced by every mature industrial society. In general, the rate of return was not high enough to induce people to invest in British industry.

Finally, British culture seemed to discourage innovative business practices, particularly in marketing and customer services. British managers tended to look back to the past, when British industry had everything its own way. An *old boy network* and social status prevailed in recruitment and promotion of the managerial class. Britain had no business schools until the 1960s, and engineering (unlike pure science) remained a relatively low-status profession. Moreover, the old landed ideal, with its prejudice against hard work and commercial profit, softened the drive of British businessmen. An American diplomat in 1955 noticed

a sense of doubt concerning the social utility of industry and the legitimacy of profit, a sort of industrial inferiority complex often suffered by business leaders themselves. . . . In the extreme, some British industrialists seem almost ashamed of their vocation, looking on their jobs as a necessary evil or—in the case of family businesses—an inherited “white man’s burden.”

Many cultural historians argued that the traditional British sense of national identity as predominantly rural, rooted in the countryside—typified by stately homes and the Lake District—also contributed to this industrial inferiority complex. They noted that British executives directed their energies toward acquiring country homes and rural retreats. Shaped by this embarrassment about industry, the ablest young people did not opt for business; instead, they studied the arts and humanities and entered the professions (law, medicine, academe, and the civil service), where service rather than profit, expertise rather than production, constituted the dominant values.

The Age of Affluence in Britain, then, was marked not only by economic growth and consumer prosperity, but also by increasing competitive shortcomings in the world economy. The quality of life as well as the quantity of life was never higher for most people, but both in retrospect were enjoyed on borrowed time. As Prime Minister Edward Heath was to say in 1973,

The alternative to expansion is not, as some occasionally seem to suppose, an England of quiet market towns linked only by trains puffing slowly and peace-fully through green meadows. The alternative is slums, dangerous roads, old factories, cramped schools, stunted lives.

GENDER, CLASS, AND RACE IN THE AFFLUENT SOCIETY

To the ordinary British citizen of the 1950s and 1960s, however, talk of British decline or lack of competitiveness was nonsense; the great new fact of life was a higher standard of living. Most people received from social services more than they paid in through taxes, and as we have seen, average income went up faster than prices. Families were able to buy homes, automobiles, televisions, and the like. These material comforts took less work to purchase: the average work week fell to less than forty-five hours, and most people had three weeks' holiday a year. The standard lifestyle became more privatized—that is, it centered on the home and revolved around activities such as watching television, gardening, and working on do-it-yourself projects on the house or car.

For the still significant numbers of married women, and particularly married women with children, who did not work outside the home, the privatization of family life often meant isolation and loneliness, as British sociologist Hannah Gavron discovered when she investigated the lives of house-bound mothers. In *The Captive Wife* (1966), Gavron asked, “Have all the great changes in the position of women in the last one hundred and fifty years come to nothing?”

Perhaps housebound women felt more isolated in part because fewer women were remaining within their houses. The effects of the affluent society on women were decisively in favor of normalizing work outside the home. The proportion of women in the work force remained very stable (at about 30 percent) from 1851 to 1951. Likewise, the percentage of women who worked outside the home stood at about 35 percent between 1851 and 1951. Not even the two world wars, which had temporarily drawn large numbers of women into industry, significantly altered these long-term figures. What changed between 1914 and the 1950s was the greater *diversity* of jobs held by women and the increase of *middle-class* women engaged in gainful employment. Thus, in the early years of the twentieth century, about 40 percent of all working women were in domestic service, but by 1951 only 23 percent were; in the 1950s over 32 percent worked as clerks and secretaries in business and commerce.

After World War II, the number of married women working outside the home increased radically, and in the 1950s and 1960s, the proportion of the total female population who were employed went up as well. In 1931, work was still for single women, but in 1951, the proportion of working women who were married reached 40 percent and, in 1961, over 50 percent. The proportion of women in the labor force now grew to about 35 percent, with 42 percent of all women employed. Women flowed into office jobs, retail clerks' positions, and teaching, and in lesser numbers into the professions. This amounted to a social revolution.

The causes of this revolution were both demographic and economic. The average age at marriage was declining, but the birth rate remained low. Hence, married women on average in Britain now spent only four years in pregnancy and caring for infants, as compared to fifteen years in the late nineteenth century. They were much more inclined in the 1950s and 1960s to return to work once their children reached school age. Moreover, the ever-growing expectations of material goods by families drew women into employment, at the same time as domestic labor-saving devices made it possible.

The rising number of women at work contributed to more equal gender roles, though complete equality, whether formal or informal, was not attained. Employment gave a growing number of women a sense of economic and psychological independence, especially because female employment was no longer concentrated in subservient fields such as domestic service. Legislative changes reflected shifting gender roles. The Divorce Reform Act (1969) made irretrievable breakdown of the marriage the sole

ground for divorce, and one that was equally open to women and men; the Matrimonial Property Act (1970) recognized women's contributions to marital property in kind as well as in money, and the Equal Pay Act (1970) established the principle of equal pay for equal work. Most of these laws, however, were to a degree ignored in practice.

In informal terms the advance of equality for women was slower. In some British homes, men in the 1960s helped more with housework and child rearing, but this was a largely middle-class phenomenon. *Separate spheres* still existed, though in a changed form: men tended to wash dishes, repair the house, and tend the garden, and women did the shopping, cooking, and child care—while *also* holding down a job outside the home. Men still got the lion's share of higher education: in the 1960s only about a quarter of university students were female. And the old double standard continued to exist in matters of sex. In a survey completed in 1969, for example, 63 percent of the women reported that they were virgins at the time of their marriage, as compared to only 26 percent of the men.

Superficially, the new affluence tended to diminish class differences. Working people could now afford mass-produced clothes that resembled the finery of the upper classes. Working-class and middle-class people became more alike in material comforts and leisure activities. Middle-class families could no longer afford servants (who now flocked to better paying, higher status jobs), and many working-class families could have homes, cars, and holidays. As the number of professional administrators in the society grew, working-class young men had greater chances of upward social mobility. White-collar workers, who occupied a middle ground between workers and managers, increased as a percentage of the work force. The distribution of incomes became somewhat less unequal: by one account the richest 1 percent of the population owned 43 percent of all wealth in 1954, but only 30 percent in 1972.

Nevertheless, class and class consciousness remained the keys to British social structure and social relations. *Embourgeoisement*—the conversion of working people to middle-class attitudes—was much talked about in the 1950s, but it never really came about. One major poll in 1972 showed that 95 percent of the British people identified themselves with some social class. In general in such polls about two-thirds said they were working class, slightly less than one-third said they were middle class, and the remainder (about 1 percent) said they were upper class. People's sense of what they could aspire to also revealed the continuing realities of class

divisions. For most working people, hard manual labor with no real possibility of promotion was reality. Middle-class people could aspire to “get another couple of notches up,” as one chemist put it, and to “send the boys to boarding school.” Middle-class and professional men and women had job security and rising promotion (and salary) scales, whereas working-class people left school at age fifteen for a job with a relatively static wage scale. Upper-class types still enjoyed a graceful and comfortable life. As one upper-class Labour cabinet minister, Richard Crossman, put it, “Ann and I have a facility of freedom and an amplitude of life . . . which cuts us off from the vast mass of people.”

The solidarity of the working class showed itself in the power of the trade unions. The years of full employment encouraged trade union membership among workers, especially males. In 1971, 58 percent of all male employees belonged to unions. (The respective figure for women was 32 percent because the union leadership continued to think of their organizations as male institutions.) Overall, union membership reached 44 percent of the total work force, which was the highest level in British history except in the unusual years of 1919–20. White-collar unions among administrative personnel became important for the first time. The number of strikes averaged about twenty-five hundred a year, causing the annual loss of some three million workdays. As we will see, industrial conflict got worse, not better, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and this was eventually to help bring the postwar age of consensus to an end.

Meanwhile, a new division was emerging in British society: race. The transformation of British society into a multicolored, multicultural society was both *inevitable* and *inadvertent*. Affluence explains the inevitability. With an expanding economy and full employment, Britain needed workers. Attracted by the prospects of solid jobs with pay rates far above what they could make at home, immigrants from the West Indies and the Indian subcontinent began to come to Britain in increasing numbers. Britain’s political leaders, both Labour and Conservative, did not approve of this development. In one of his typically memorable statements, Churchill used an image familiar to every Briton—that of a common British bird, the black-and-white magpie—to warn that allowing people of color to immigrate to Britain would create “a magpie society” and “that would never do.”

Yet inadvertently, British political leaders devised policies that encouraged mass immigration of people of color. In the years after World War II, policy makers in both parties were particularly concerned both to

strengthen the ties between the United Kingdom and the so-called white Commonwealth—Australia, New Zealand, and Canada—and to reinforce the *Britishness* of these states. Hence, despite the desperate need for labor to rebuild its war-ravaged economy, postwar British governments encouraged the emigration of Britons to the white Commonwealth. And, as part of this effort to solidify the bonds between the home country and the white Commonwealth, Attlee's government in 1948 passed the British Nationality Act, which declared that citizens of the United Kingdom *and its colonies* shared a common citizenship. Inadvertently, the Act made it easier for immigrants from any imperial or Commonwealth country to move to Britain, with full rights of British citizenship.

By 1970, 450,000 migrants from the West Indies (the majority from Jamaica), 119,000 from Pakistan, and 270,000 from India had made their home in Britain. They took up jobs in heavy industry as well as in the expanding welfare and health services, which heavily depended on low-wage immigrant employees. As is the case with almost all migrations, the new immigrants did not disperse evenly across the country, but concentrated in a few urban areas, notably London, Birmingham, and Bradford. They often believed that they were in a sense coming home because their educational systems and in many cases their churches had taught them to think of themselves as British. Instead, they encountered hostility, discrimination, and sometimes violence. As early as 1958 the Notting Hill area of London and the city of Nottingham suffered serious race riots. The openly racist British National party formed in 1960.

Convinced that the presence of rather than the prejudice against racial minorities was the problem, British politicians looked to curb the immigration of people of color. In 1962, the Conservative government devised a quota system designed to limit nonwhite immigration. Further restrictions followed in 1965 under the Labour government, which also, however, passed Britain's first Race Relations Act. The act banned discrimination on the "grounds of colour, race, or ethnic or national origins" in public places. In 1968 Labour extended the act to cover employment and housing.

That same year, however, the Rivers of Blood controversy showed that, despite the Race Relations Act, serious racial prejudice and tensions continued to exist. The controversy centered on what is now a notorious speech delivered by Enoch Powell (1912–98), a member of the Conservative *shadow cabinet*. (In the British parliamentary system, parties not in office appoint spokespersons who "shadow" or parallel each governing cabinet member.) In

the speech, Powell declared, “We must be mad, literally mad” to allow the mass immigration of people of color. Powell called for a ban on further immigration and the voluntary repatriation of “colored” immigrants already in Britain. He concluded with a quotation from the Roman poet Virgil: “I seem to see ‘the River Tiber foaming with much blood.’” Horrified by what seemed an open incitement to racial violence, Conservative party leader Edward Heath condemned Powell and booted him out of the shadow cabinet. Yet the speech made Powell a popular hero. More than one hundred thousand men and women wrote him to express their support and over 70 percent of those surveyed agreed with Powell’s stand against a multiracial society.

THE PERMISSIVE SOCIETY

Much of the anxiety aroused by the changing color of Britishness fed on the fears and hopes aroused by rapid cultural change. By the late 1950s, it had become clear that affluence was working as a powerful corrosive, eating away at the Victorian moral code of the middle and the “respectable” working classes. (The aristocracy and the non-respectable stratum of the poor had never paid much attention to Victorian morality.) Freed from the traditional discipline of economic survival, young and old alike turned to immediate gratification of personal desires. The relative independence of young people from parental control also fueled this cultural shift toward *permissiveness*. Full employment meant that working-class boys and girls who left school at age fifteen immediately jumped into adult-waged jobs—and adult freedoms.

The youth of Britain had more money, more freedom to spend it, and more to spend it on than ever before in British history. Teenagers, in fact, enjoyed more disposable income than any other age group. Inevitably, they came to dominate a major segment of the consumer market, one that revolved around clothes, records, radios, motor scooters, and other items subject to commercialized trends in fashion. Throughout the period youth tended to become almost a separate social class, knit together (and yet internally divided) by fashion and pop music. Rock music, introduced into Britain by the American group Bill Haley and the Comets in 1957, became a major feature of popular culture. Bands such as the Beatles, the Who, and the Rolling Stones expressed the age-old rebelliousness of young people in a new, highly marketable form and gave them subcultures—complete with heroes, icons, rituals, uniforms, and discourse—closed to their elders and

often generating somewhat hysterical fear about juvenile delinquency and moral decline. In the 1950s, for example, commentators wondered whether the Teddy Boys, with their Edwardian-style suits, elaborately slicked back hair, and passion for Elvis Presley, represented a criminal threat. In the early 1960s, public concern shifted to the often violent rivalries between the Mods, who rode scooters, affected expensive tailored suits, and used amphetamines to fuel their clubbing nightlife, and the Rockers, who preferred motorcycles, jeans and leather jackets, alcohol, and American rock and roll.

At the same time, the rapid expansion of the universities took many thousands of young people (still largely middle class) away from home to institutions that were no longer interested in acting *in loco parentis* (in place of the parents). By the later 1960s, discontent with outdated curricula and the authoritarian nature of much university life fused with radical politics in sometimes violent radical student movements. These movements stirred uninhibited personal pleasure, idealistic socialism, and hostility to authority into a potent ideological brew; they peaked between 1967 and 1970 in numerous protests and sit-ins.

Yet the permissive society did not contain only youth, nor were affluence and the expansion of the universities the only causes. In the second half of the 1960s, Harold Wilson's Labour government, particularly Roy Jenkins (1920–2003), who served first as Wilson's Home secretary and then his chancellor of the exchequer, accelerated the pace of social change—much to the discomfort of Wilson himself, who came from a staunch Non-conformist family. The reforms that Jenkins oversaw included the abolition of capital punishment and the legalization of abortion and homosexuality in 1967, the end of theater censorship in 1968, and the easing of divorce in 1969. When critics condemned him for helping create the permissive society, Jenkins replied that a better label was the civilized society. He saw these changes as part of the advance of individual liberty:

Let us be on the side of those who want people to be free to live their own lives, to make their own mistakes, and to decide, in an adult way and provided they do not infringe on the rights of others, the code by which they wish to live.

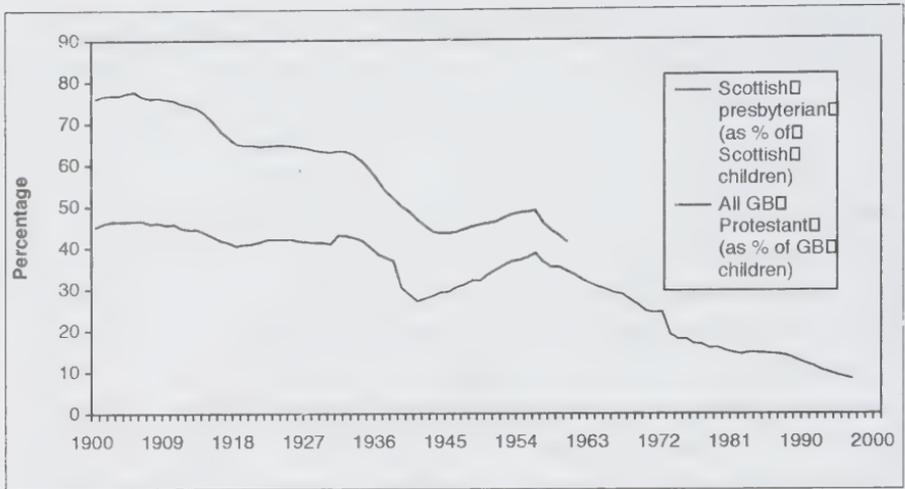
Many Britons, however, saw the permissive society as less about individual liberty and more about social breakdown. Campaigners such as Mary Whitehouse and her National Viewers' and Listeners' Association (NVLA) protested angrily against what they saw as moral decline. They argued that the consequences of permissiveness were clear: drugs, sex, and crime. Drug use did become more prevalent in this era, particularly among youth.

Marijuana became the preferred drug, though the Beatles' hit song "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" was thought to be a tribute to LSD. In 1964 possession of nonprescription drugs became illegal, but the new law had little effect.

The amount of nudity, sex, and violence depicted in the press, in film, on stage, and on television also increased—as the NVLA carefully tracked. Perhaps the iconic moment came in 1969, when Australian entrepreneur Rupert Murdoch purchased one of Britain's national daily newspapers. Relaunched as the *Sun*, the tabloid introduced British culture to the "page 3 girl," a new topless woman on page 3 every day. But the end to Victorianism extended beyond sexual representation to sexual practice. One important factor was the improvement and spread of contraception, which lowered the risks of sexual activity. By 1970, 60 percent of all couples were using contraceptives, and 20 percent of all married women were taking the pill. Women in greater numbers assumed that sex was something for them as well as for men to enjoy. Although we should not exaggerate the sexual revolution of the 1960s—for example, at one university in 1970 almost all the women surveyed said that they were virgins when they arrived—the rates of premarital and extramarital sex did increase. That same university survey found that, by their third year, fewer than half the women remained virgins. Despite the spread of contraception and the legalization of abortions, the number of illegitimate births rose by 60 percent between 1950 and 1970.

Most alarming to many Britons was the rising crime rate. Britain remained much more peaceful and law-abiding than the United States; nevertheless, between 1951 and 1972, cases of crimes against property tripled. Violent crime rates also climbed—up by more than 60 percent between 1967 and 1971. The highest rates of increase were for people under twenty-one years of age. In reaction, the number of police officers increased by almost 40 percent and police officers more frequently had to carry guns. Many conventional folk blamed the increasing crime rate on the abolition of the death penalty in 1965. Probably the actual culprit was affluence itself, along with its spin-off, self-indulgence. As standards of material acquisition went up, so also did the gap between those who could buy the goods and those who could not. In the words of one official report:

The material revolution is plain to see. At one and the same time, it has provided more desirable objects, greater opportunity for acquiring them illegally, and considerable chances of immunity from the undesirable consequences of so doing.



British Sunday school enrollment, 1900–1996: percentage of 5–14 year-olds.
 Source: Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 168.

The rapid de-Christianization of British society in the 1960s was both a cause and an effect of permissiveness. Mass immigration from the Commonwealth meant, of course, that the number of Britons who adhered to other religions, particularly Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism, was growing rapidly and would, over the coming decades, challenge the idea that to be British was to be at least culturally Christian. But at the same time, church culture was contracting. Church attendance had been declining for decades, but it was the late 1950s and the 1960s that saw a dramatic drop in other markers of religious faith, including Sunday school attendance, infant baptism, and religious weddings. This decline seemed all the more sudden because the numbers had held fairly steady throughout the 1920s and 1930s and then had actually risen between 1945 and 1958 as Britons turned from the horrors of war to traditional certainties. But in the Age of Affluence, the churches could not compete with the lure of consumption. By the 1970s, only 5.5 million Britons (including those in Northern Ireland) were active members of Protestant churches, and 5.3 million were practicing Roman Catholics.

THE CULTURE OF AUSTERITY AND AFFLUENCE

One of the dominant motifs of British culture in the postwar decades was the widespread sense that between 1939 and 1951 Britain had experi-

enced a sharp break with history. This notion simultaneously caused pride and regret, high hopes, and disillusionment. World War II was seen as decisive, not only for the defeat of Germany, but also for the cooperation between the Soviet Union and the West. The hopefulness of that cooperation soon collapsed in the bitterness of the Cold War. Likewise, the use of atomic bombs in 1945, and the subsequent proliferation of atomic weapons, cast a pall on victory. The welfare state gave reason for celebration by the idealistic left, but its shortcomings spurred strong critique.

Perhaps the strongest such critique was that formulated by the *New Left*. Under this label gathered a group of loosely connected young scholars and writers who, in the pages of the *New Left Review* and other publications, condemned the inhumanity and criminality of Stalinism and, unlike the old left, expressed increasing concern about the power of the modern state. Out of the ranks of the New Left came three major British thinkers: Richard Hoggart (1918–), Raymond Williams (1921–88), and E. P. Thompson (1924–93). All three turned away from a clanking, deterministic type of Marxism toward a more subtle and humane form looking back to Marx's early writings on alienation. On this basis they offered a radical critique of British society and culture. Hoggart criticized the mass media for eroding the ability of the working class to sustain its own authentic perspective on life and work. Williams explored the social foundations of literary culture, which he saw as now regrettably separate from the lives of ordinary people. He explained that the idea of culture itself had developed as a moral reaction against capitalist industrialism, but had turned in self-defense away from involvement with society. Thompson, a social historian and polemicist of great passion and insight, showed in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) how the English laboring poor had made themselves into a new community during the Industrial Revolution. His sense of people's active role in forming their own lives shaped his own political engagement.

Hoggart, Williams, and Thompson were all connected to British universities (al-though in the case of Thompson, not very comfortably); more than ever, the universities served as the locales for intellectual life in Britain. Not only natural scientists, social scientists, and humanistic scholars found their outlets for teaching and research in the universities, but also a growing number of novelists, poets, and critics. This development was not entirely healthy, for the specialization encouraged by universities made a holistic view of life and the world nearly impossible. In 1959, eminent scientific administrator and novelist C. P. Snow (1905–80) called attention to



Francis Bacon, Painting (1946). Completed in the immediate aftermath of World War II, Painting established Bacon as an artist of the first rank. Bacon's long-standing obsession with butcher shops appears in this scene of a quintessential British civil servant (dark suit, umbrella) in the midst of surreal horror.

the fragmentation of high culture in his famous “Two Cultures” lecture at Cambridge. He argued that scientists knew little about literature, that literary folk knew nothing about modern science, and that Britain needed its intellectuals to offer an integrated vision. The leading Cambridge literary critic, F. R. Leavis (1895–1978), then mounted a fierce attack against Snow for preferring scientists to literary intellectuals. The subsequent bitter dispute between the two men revealed that the divide between the two cultures was all too real. At its base the debate centered on the fact of industrialization and the pre-eminence of science in the modern world: Was modernity morally superior to the preindustrial world? Snow said yes, Leavis said no, and the divide between the two cultures grew wider.

Leavis's cultural pessimism was widely shared, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the war, as British artists tried to make sense of the years of destruction and death. For example, Francis Bacon (1909–92) produced works of power rather than beauty. His images of monstrous, half-



Henry Moore, Woman (1957–1958). By the time Moore sculpted this work, he was one of Britain's most revered artists.

human creatures, often crouched in tortured postures, evoked a society disfigured by slaughter. In contrast, the preeminent postwar sculptor Henry Moore (1898–1986) created works far less disturbed and disturbing, although just as thoroughly engaged with questions of meaning and existence. Like many modernist artists, Moore turned to the simple lines and forms of the art of so-called primitive peoples. Influenced by pre-Columbian Mexican sculpture as well as by England's rolling landscape, Moore's massive works expressed his optimism about the enduring power of elemental forces such as love and sexuality.

In British writing after the war we see a retreat from the modernist stylistic experimentation that had typified the interwar works of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, but the major modernist theme—alienation—continued to dominate. Dystopian fiction attracted many readers. George Orwell (1903–50), who had been an ardent if cantankerous socialist in the interwar period, now expressed grave doubts about the leviathan states created by total war. In *1984* (1949), Orwell painted a bleak picture of a world dominated by warring, mind-warping superpowers. His death from tuberculosis at age forty-seven in 1950 cut short the career of one of the most widely read of all serious writers in the English language. Evelyn Waugh (1903–66), a prominent satirist during the interwar period, now expressed archconservative disgust for the modern world. In *Love Among the Ruins* (1953; subtitled *A Romance of the Near Future*), the aptly named protagonist Miles



Richard Hamilton, Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing? (1956). Playful and satirical, pop art explored the meaning of mass production and consumption.

Plastic works at a euthanasia center processing the “welfare weary” citizens who are eager for death. William Golding (1911–93) also set his 1954 novel *The Lord of the Flies* in the near future; in this powerful work about a group of public schoolboys stranded on an island after an atomic bomb attack on Britain, Golding explored the savage impulses that lurk beneath our civilized selves.

The most widely read book from the era, however, was set not in the near-future but in the distant past, and it took the form not of a realistic novel but of a mythic epic; even so, it expressed its author's alienation from much of the world he saw emerging about him. Published in three parts in 1954 and 1955, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is now the third best-selling work of fiction ever written. Tolkien (1892–1973), a philologist at Oxford University, combined his love of languages and the English landscape with his devout Catholicism in a sprawling saga that—despite the presence of elves, dwarfs, wizards, and talking trees—spoke to postwar fears of modern technology and the concentration of power. Tolkien's tale of the gentlemanly Frodo and his manservant Sam, two quintessential Englishmen (even if they are hobbits with furry feet), on a quest to save Middle-earth from tyranny, spawned the modern fantasy genre and reinforced Britain's position as a dominant force in global popular culture.

By the end of the 1950s, British artists, writers, and intellectuals began to engage more directly with the perils and pleasures of the affluent society.



David Hockney, A Bigger Splash (1967). Hockney's Los Angeles' paintings offered Britons an appealing vision of an even more affluent society across the Atlantic.

Turning away from the anguish of Bacon's tormented canvases or the solid affirmations of Moore's sculptures, visual artists became more playful as they both celebrated and challenged the new mass consumerism. In the late 1950s, the Independent Group, a loose collection of artists and designers, took on the task of establishing an "aesthetics of plenty," and sought to destroy the boundary between fine art and popular culture. For example, Richard Hamilton's *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* (1957) uses several images from the new consumer society to poke a bit of fun at postwar domesticity.

Together with similar movements on the Continent and in the United States, the artists of the Independent Group helped create what became known as Pop Art. The most well-known British Pop artist, however, always rejected that label. In 1957 David Hockney (1937–) moved from his native Yorkshire to London and quickly began his ascent to the very top of the British art world. (A survey of one thousand British artists in 2011 would declare him "the most influential British artist of all time.") Hockney's use of commercial images (such as a box of Typhoo Tea) in his early works placed him in the Pop Art camp, but he soon transcended any artistic category. In the later 1960s, Hockney began spending part of the year in Los Angeles, where he painted a series of works that enshrined his fascination with California's blue skies and swimming pools, as well as the tanned brown bodies of young American men.

The writers who reacted most sensationally to the materialism of Britain in the age of the welfare state and affluence were the novelists known as the Angry Young Men. Drawn from the lower-middle or working class, they all benefited from the increased opportunities of the era, but opposed what they saw as the pervasive purposelessness and mindless consumerism of the Age of Affluence. They were angry because things had not changed enough despite the war and welfare: snobbery, class divisions, conventional morality, and traditional institutions such as the monarchy and the church remained. Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), for example, revealed the mindless pleasure-seeking of a young factory worker, who lives only for his weekends of drinking and womanizing and who is unconscious of the Labour party's long struggle to attain the welfare state. Most famous of all was John Osborne's play, *Look Back in Anger* (1956), in which the hero rages against conventional pieties, the lack of commitment among those around him, and his own powerlessness.

The Angry Young Men's concerns with social realism and the continuing class inequities of affluent Britain also shaped the "kitchen sink drama" of British film, theater, and television in this era. For the first time, realistic portrayals of genuine working-class lives dominated stage and screen as many of the Angry Young Man novels became first-rate films. Although most of the kitchen sink dramas were set in the industrial cities of the Midlands and the North, London venues such as the Royal Court Theatre and the Theatre Workshop became central to the movement and to the launching of many influential British actors and dramatists. The BBC also played an important role; its *Wednesday Play* often featured works that fell within the kitchen sink category. For example, Ken Loach's work first appeared on the *Wednesday Play*; in later films such as the heartbreaking and hard-hitting *Kes* (1969) which follows the doomed efforts of a working-class boy to escape his lot, Loach (1936–) continued to illuminate Britain's social inequities in unsparing detail.

But fittingly enough, the most long-lasting and influential cultural production that emerged out of the kitchen sink movement was developed not in the London studios of the BBC or on a London stage, but in the northern industrial city of Manchester. In 1960, the Granada Television Company, which held the license for commercial television in the northwest of England, launched *Coronation Street*. A soap opera set in a fictionalized version of Salford (a borough just north of Manchester), *Coronation Street* followed the lives of the very ordinary inhabitants of a very ordinary working-class

street. Quickly picked up by Britain's other commercial television companies and still running today, "Corrie" became an iconic if somewhat romanticized representation of the British working class.

The multimedia aspect of kitchen sink drama, like Pop Art, shows that the lines between British high and popular culture were ever more fluid. So, too, does the career of one of Britain's most important postwar writers, Graham Greene (1904–91). Greene's output included plays, short stories, film scripts, travel stories, and novels that ranged from detective stories to political thrillers to religious dramas. In his early career, Greene divided his work into entertainments and novels, and argued that only the latter should determine his literary reputation. The distinction never made much sense to readers or critics, and by the end of the 1960s, Greene himself abandoned this attempt to distinguish between high and popular literature. All of his work not only entertains, but it also explores the imperatives and dilemmas of religion and morality in the bleak conditions of decolonization and the Cold War.

By the end of the 1960s, British rock music was also breaking down the boundaries between high and popular culture. In the late 1950s, four young working-class men from the seaport of Liverpool—John Lennon (1940–80), Paul McCartney (1942–), George Harrison (1943–2001), Ringo Starr (1940–)—began to mix the new American rock and roll with Northern working-class musical styles and sensibilities to achieve a potent blend. In 1963 the Beatles had their first number one hit in Britain with "Please, Please Me"; by February 1964, when they first toured the United States, they were an international phenomenon. Musical critics, however, did not take the group seriously until the release of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in 1967. Frequently hailed as the most influential rock album ever made, *Sgt. Pepper* jumped the divide between popular and serious music with its Pop Art album cover, experimental recording techniques, and existentialist lyrics that one critic compared to T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*.

Eliot himself shifted largely to writing plays and literary criticism in the 1950s (he died in 1965), but poetry continued to flourish in postwar Britain. Like Eliot, John Betjeman (1906–84) was a practicing Anglican whose religious faith and doubt permeated his verse, but he wrote in traditional, deceptively simple rhymes. His love for everyday Englishness and his ability to see the extraordinary in ordinary acts made him one of the most genuinely popular British poets of the twentieth century. He became poet laureate in 1972. Like Betjeman, Philip Larkin (1922–85) believed in clear, accessible, technically proficient poetry that adhered to traditional rhyme

and meter. Taking as themes the distance between hope and reality, the deceptiveness of choice, and the certainty of old age and death, Larkin wrote poems that were rather more downbeat than Betjeman's, although often grimly humorous:

They f*** you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you.

Betjeman's successor as poet laureate was Ted Hughes (1930–98), a poet of violent emotions and seeming admiration of violence. His poetry reveals an awareness that in the modern world miracles and madness are scarcely distinguishable. Hughes admired the capacity of animals to do what humans cannot—to see clearly—thus, the hawk:

Effortlessly at height hangs his still eye.
His wings hold all creation in a weightless quiet
Steady as a hallucination in the streaming air.

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Chapter 29

Illusions of Power: International and Domestic Politics, 1945–1970

In British political history, the 1950s and 1960s are called the Age of Consensus because both major parties accepted the welfare state and management of the economy to ensure full employment. Political differences between the parties seemed to shrink and government increasingly seemed to be a matter of fine-tuning by experts. Yet consensus included political failure as well as achievement. Neither party was able to solve the long-term problems of the British economy, and each was in turn driven to adopt the same policies to cope with short-term crises. The power of the British government over fundamental economic troubles was thus illusory, and as we will see in the next chapter, the political consensus gradually broke apart. Moreover, illusions of power overseas contributed to that essential weakness. One after another, Labour and Conservative cabinets found that they had to give up these illusions, withdraw from Britain's traditional worldwide commitments, and reconfigure Britain's role in the world.

International Politics, 1945–1970

- 1945 Labour government under Clement Attlee
- 1947 Decision to pursue independent atomic weapon; withdrawal from India, Pakistan, Burma, and Ceylon (Sri Lanka)
- 1948 Withdrawal from Palestine; Malayan "emergency" begins
- 1949 Formation of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
- 1950 Outbreak of Korean War; Britain participates
- 1951 Conservative government under Winston Churchill
- 1952 First British atomic bomb test; Mau Mau rebellion begins in Kenya
- 1956 Suez Crisis

- 1957 First British hydrogen bomb test; Ghana becomes the first British African colony to achieve independence; formation of the European Economic Community (EEC) or Common Market, with Britain remaining aloof
- 1960 Macmillan's "Wind of Change" speech; rapid decolonization in Africa over next several years
- 1961 Failure of Britain's first application for EEC membership
- 1964 Labour government under Harold Wilson
- 1967 Failure of Britain's second application for EEC membership; withdrawal from commitments east of Suez

THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

As a result of the two world wars and changing assumptions about the role of the state in society, the scope of the government was much larger after 1945 than ever before in peacetime. The Civil Service grew to include some 750,000 people. Counting the nationalized industries, probably 25 percent of the entire work force was employed by the state. Public expenditure, excluding the nationalized industries, reached 41 percent of the gross national product (GNP) in the 1950s and 1960s. Taxes rose to about 35 to 40 percent of the GNP. The government, as we have seen, assumed leadership in maintaining a minimum standard of living for all citizens and in managing the economy. The expansion of the state in Britain, as in every Western industrial nation, seemed irresistible.

The Civil Service was a key element in the state. It provided the continuity and experience that allowed the various ministries to accomplish their plans. Having developed high professional standards in the late nineteenth century, the British Civil Service in its enlarged postwar condition remained efficient and incorruptible. Its power lay in its expertise. The civil servant's role was to advise government ministers and then carry out their decisions. In this role, civil servants were supposed to be impartial, but the Labour governments often complained of a Tory bias. There was some truth to this accusation, not because the Civil Service was deliberately partisan, but because it was recruited from a narrow upper-class base. In the 1950s and 1960s, 85 percent of the civil servants were graduates of Oxford and Cambridge. They instinctively expressed traditional upper-class views and argued for "the way things have always been done."

The constitution, however, underwent a number of changes that reflected the increased scope and complexity of government as well as the

further democratization of the electorate. The key to the unwritten British constitution after 1945 remained the unlimited power of Parliament. The actions of Parliament were (and are) not limited by any higher law, written code, or judgments by the courts. Nevertheless, the role of Parliament in governing the country, and the particular parts played by its two houses, changed to a degree. The power of the House of Lords, already restricted in 1911, was further limited in 1948 to delaying legislation for only one year. In 1958, legislation provided for the appointment of life peers and peeresses. (Titles of life peers are not inherited.) This meant not only that women for the first time sat in the upper house, but also that people of experience and achievement could invigorate its deliberations. In 1963, an act was passed allowing peers to renounce their titles in order to sit in the House of Commons, where the real political power rested.

The power of the House of Commons over the Lords was (and is) supreme, yet the Commons declined in practical authority after 1945. The reasons for that decline were the increase in the power of the electorate on the one hand and that of the prime minister and cabinet on the other. Both of these trends had been developing for a long time. The electorate (all males and females over the age of twenty-one; in 1971, the voting age was lowered to eighteen) had clearly become the source of ultimate political decisions. Parties appealed to the voters on the basis of coherent programs, advertising, and the mass media, which meant that campaign pledges limited the MPs' freedom of action in the House of Commons. The prime minister and the government tended to appeal directly to the voters, using Parliament to register decisions made by the electorate and subjecting MPs to tight discipline. The cabinet completely dominated the agenda of the House of Commons. The Commons could still set the outer limits of the government's actions and serve as a national sounding board; otherwise, after 1945 it played an almost automatic, even ritualistic, role in national policy making.

The growth of the power of the prime minister was much discussed in the 1960s, when it seemed to many observers that prime ministers were becoming more and more like American presidents. Some critics held that the prime minister's authority had grown relative to that of both the House of Commons and the cabinet. But what in fact grew was the power of the executive itself, not necessarily that of the prime minister. Some prime ministers, such as Harold Macmillan, dominated their cabinets by force of will and personality, but others, such as Clement Attlee, acted in the more old-fashioned role of chairperson of the cabinet. The prime minister's main weapons after 1945 were powers to appoint and fire cabinet ministers, to set

the agenda of cabinet meetings, and to command the attention of the mass media. Yet these powers did not amount to presidential authority, for the prime minister was constrained to a degree by the need to satisfy cabinet colleagues and the wishes of his or her party.

Unofficial interest (or pressure) groups played a major role in British government after World War II. Interest groups first became vital to British government during and after the First World War, and after 1945 they became even more so. Economic producers' groups such as the Confederation of British Industry, the National Union of Manufacturers, the British Iron and Steel Federation, the Cake and Biscuit Alliance, and hundreds of others; trade unions, and above all the Trades Union Congress; and numerous professional associations such as the British Medical Association and the National Union of Teachers all served as powerful interest groups. In addition, hundreds of voluntary associations concerned with special interests such as old age, poverty, civil liberties, and penal reform played important political roles. The very complexity of industrial society called these interest groups into being, and the expanded power of the state over economic and social affairs drew them into constant contact with departments of the government. They acted at all levels of politics—the parties, Parliament, the executive, and the Civil Service. Because of their expertise as well as their lobbying, they influenced most legislation after 1945 and in fact became an essential part of the British governmental machine.

The most important elements in the British structure of government and politics between 1945 and 1970 continued to be the political parties. Parliamentary government was party government. Moreover, in the postwar period the two major parties dominated the party system to an unusual degree. Britain had been famous for a two-party system, yet throughout the century between 1845 and 1945 there were important third and fourth parties—the Home Rulers, then Labour, and finally the Liberal party. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, the Labour and Conservative parties together won on average 91 percent of the popular vote and 95 percent of the seats in the House of Commons. Why this domination? For one thing, both parties were *national* in that they organized the politics of every region except Northern Ireland; this reflected the high degree of political integration of the British Isles since 1919. The class system and the “first-past-the-post” electoral arrangements (that is, the system whereby the candidate with the most votes in a constituency won the seat and the other candidates won nothing, no matter how many votes they earned) favored the division of the electorate into only two blocs.

There were other political parties in postwar Britain, but only the Liberals had significant national appeal. As we will see in chapter 32, the party structure in Northern Ireland differed from that in the rest of Britain. In England, Scotland, and Wales, the Communist party, the National Front (extreme right-wing nationalists), *Plaid Cymru* (the Welsh Nationalist party), and the Scottish National party all were active between 1945 and 1970, but together claimed less than 2 percent of the total vote. The Liberals, meanwhile, found that their popular support gyrated between about 2.5 percent and 9 percent, even though many of the fundamental ideas behind the welfare state were Liberal in origin. During these years, the Liberals elected as many as twelve MPs and as few as six. The class alignment of British politics had crowded the Liberals out, and many Liberal voters between 1945 and 1970 were either disgruntled Labourites or Conservatives, temporarily voting Liberal to protest some decision by their parties. This does not mean that British politics were polarized between left and right. There was in fact a broad band of moderate (center) opinion in the British electorate, but this center bloc was effectively claimed by the Labour and Conservative parties. This was the electoral meaning of consensus.

There were, however, important differences between the two parties. The Labour party, rooted in the working class and especially the trade unions, was the party of the left and center-left. In theory it had a more democratic structure than the Conservative party. The annual party conference votes on a long list of issues were supposed to direct the actions of Labour MPs and the National Executive Council (NEC), elected by the conference, officially supervised the parliamentary party. By 1945, however, the brute fact of having become one of the two parties that alternated in forming governments had expanded the prestige and power of the party leader over both the NEC and the conference. In 1945, the chairman of the NEC peppered Attlee with directions about the electoral campaign, and Attlee showed who was boss with a blunt remark: "A period of silence on your part would be welcome."

Yet the Labour party leadership after 1945 could not dictate policy to the conference and remained heavily dependent on the trade unions, which provided more than half of Labour party funds. (An important factor in this funding was that, in 1946, the Labour government restored the unions' right automatically to deduct political contributions from all union members; a unionist who did not want to contribute had to take the step of opting out.) Moreover, trade union leaders were entitled to use the *bloc vote* at the annual party conference, which meant that the union's entire vote went

to the majority position no matter how narrow the majority. This gave the biggest unions (the transport workers, the municipal employees, and the miners) decisive power in both the conference and the NEC. Although Labour party leaders had to take a broader view of national affairs than simply trade union interests, they could not defy strongly held union policies.

The Conservative party, occupying the center-right and right of the political spectrum, depended on the votes of the middle class, three-fourths of whom voted Tory. The parliamentary party leadership, however, still tended to come from the upper class. The parliamentary leadership wrote the party platforms and in effect required the annual conference to ratify them. Until 1965, the top few parliamentary figures selected the party leader in a secretive process; after 1965, the conference won the right to elect the leader, but still exercised little control over him (or her—Margaret Thatcher became the first female party leader in 1975). Conservative MPs were overwhelmingly drawn from the ranks of wealthy company owners and professionals (whereas almost half of the Labour MPs were trade unionists). Two-thirds of the postwar Tory MPs had gone to the exclusive public schools and about one-third to Oxbridge. The Conservative conference, meanwhile, reflected that part of middle-class Britain that had a foot in the countryside. As the *Economist* observed in 1957, “There they were—the clergyman’s wife, the small employer, the retired service officer, the county lady—the softly respectable representatives of suburban and rural but not industrial England.” Despite this social composition, the Conservative party managed to win about one-third of the working-class votes in each election.

LABOUR AND THE PROBLEMS OF EMPIRE, 1945–1951

In view of the big majority won by the Labour party in 1945 and the subsequent legislative success of the Attlee government, Labour might have been expected to rule for a very long time. This proved not to be the case. By 1948 the Labour government had completed the construction of the welfare state and carried out most of its nationalization of industry. Its agenda largely fulfilled, the party began to suffer serious internal divisions. In addition, the government’s program of economic austerity had become unpopular, and the public wanted to get rid of wartime controls. Thus, in the election of 1950, the government’s majority was sharply reduced. As the party’s morale sagged, the government was torn by a hot dispute between left-wingers and moderates over proposals to nationalize more industries. More

ominously, defense spending, which the moderates supported and the left opposed, began to encroach on expenditures for the welfare state, especially the National Health Service.

The problem of defense spending in 1950–51 is a reminder that the Labour government did not operate in an international vacuum. The British emerged from World War II with the *appearance* and the *habits* of a world power. These trapped the Attlee government into relatively conventional approaches to foreign and imperial affairs. The British were among the victors in the war and occupied the most industrialized part of Germany. Attlee in 1945 met with Truman and Stalin as if an equal, just as Churchill had done with Roosevelt and Stalin. But in fact, as the Attlee government soon realized, the British could no longer keep all their commitments around the world. The question was where to withdraw and where to hold on.

In retrospect, one might well argue that the Labour government should have radically altered the role of Britain in the world, dropped the pretense (and expense) of being a world power, abandoned old imperial connections, and settled for being a medium-sized European state. But Labour leaders, just like their Conservative counterparts, regarded the Empire as the source of Britain's global power. As Labour Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin put it, empire provided the means "to develop our own power and influence to equal that of the U.S. of A. and the U.S.S.R." In addition, more than half of Britain's exports went to the Commonwealth, and many in the Labour party thought that to jettison the underdeveloped colonies in Africa and elsewhere would be unfair to the colonial peoples. Instead, Labour adopted the policy of *trusteeship* for the dependent colonies—a policy of economic and political development that looked forward to a distant future for colonial self-government. This way the British could retain the economic value of the colonies while still acknowledging the right of national self-determination.

Trusteeship, however, required the British to retain military and naval bases, army garrisons, police forces, and administrative personnel overseas. To keep up these forces, together with the half million occupying troops in Germany, the British committed themselves to peacetime conscription and to substantial foreign military expenditures. In addition, Attlee and his cabinet decided formally (but without telling Parliament) to construct an atomic weapon in 1947. Cut off from American nuclear research the year before, the British regarded the possession of an independent atomic bomb as a way to maintain great power status. The first British atomic bomb was tested in 1952; the British then jumped into the race for the hydrogen

bomb. For all these reasons, Britain's expenditures on defense were the third highest in the world, behind only the United States and the Soviet Union, and remained so throughout the period from 1945 to 1970.

In some areas, however, the Attlee government realized that Britain could not retain imperial control. The prime examples were India, Pakistan, Burma, and Ceylon. During the war, Indian nationalists had made it plain that the days of the British *Raj* were numbered. The Labour cabinet agreed, for Labour had been committed to Indian independence since the 1930s. Hugh Dalton, chancellor of the exchequer, said in 1946 that, "if you are in a place where you are not wanted, and where you have not got the force, or perhaps the will, to squash those who don't want you, the only thing to do is to come out." In 1946, an upsurge in violence between Hindus and Muslims showed that Britain no longer actually controlled the country. Although all Indian nationalists demanded independence from Britain, representatives of the Muslim minority wanted a separate Muslim state (Pakistan), and the Hindu majority wanted a unified India. The British preferred a federation for all India, but were unable to impose this solution. Therefore, amid terrible scenes of communal bloodshed, India and Pakistan became independent in August 1947. Both opted to remain as republics within the Commonwealth. Burma (now Myanmar) and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) followed soon after.

The departure from India meant that the British no longer had their old strategic interest in keeping the Middle Eastern routes to India. But increasingly since World War I, the value of the Middle East rested on the crucial resource of oil. Britain after 1945 imported more than three-fourths of its oil from the Persian Gulf region through the Suez Canal. Thus, Attlee's government had to figure out how to protect Britain's oil interests in the Middle East while cutting other commitments in the region. The government concluded that it was essential to retain paramount interest in (1) Iraq, which protected the eastern approaches to the Suez Canal; (2) Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and what became the United Arab Emirates, which together produced most of Britain's oil; and (3) Aden, which controlled the Red Sea entrance to the canal. Everything else became negotiable. Thus, the British in 1947 gave up to the United States their role of supporting the governments of Greece and Turkey. And in 1948 they abandoned their mandated territory, Palestine, to the rival Arab and Jewish claimants in the area.

The British role in the Palestine Mandate for thirty years had been a source of confusion and violence. The Lloyd George government in 1917 had promised European Zionists to create a national home for Jews in Pales-

tine, but it also fostered the hopes of Arab nationalists to encourage their revolt against the Ottoman Empire during World War I. Arab leaders believed that Britain had promised to support Arab rule in Palestine. The British disputed this view, but whatever the merits of the various arguments, the Arabs hotly opposed Jewish immigration into Palestine, which threatened to become a flood after World War II. In an attempt to stabilize the region, the British tried to limit postwar Jewish immigration, a move that aroused much anger in a post-Holocaust world. By 1947 Palestine had erupted into a triangular war among the British, Jews, and Arabs that the British public did not understand or support. British policy makers decided that the national interest dictated disengagement. In 1948, the British simply abandoned Palestine, and the Jews succeeded in establishing their own state, Israel, in most of the territory west of the Jordan River.

Meanwhile, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union increasingly shaped British foreign relations after 1945. We have seen that Churchill's suspicions of Soviet intentions grew during 1944 and 1945. In 1946, Churchill declared in a speech in Fulton, Missouri, that an "iron curtain has descended across the Continent" because of Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. American and Soviet relations rapidly worsened in disagreements over Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Germany, among others. Rejecting the appeals of Labour's left wing, which wanted Britain to stand aside from the polarization of world politics, Attlee and Bevin aligned Britain with the United States. Fierce anticommunists, they saw Soviet domination of eastern Europe as a threat to the entire Continent. Hence, in 1949, the Attlee government took a leading role in the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, which bound Britain, the western European countries, Greece, Turkey, the United States, and Canada to automatic mutual military assistance. This was an unprecedented step for Britain, which had long treasured its freedom of action in Europe. In another unprecedented policy, Attlee's government also accepted American air force bases in Britain.

The high cost of participating in the Cold War came home to the Labour party in 1950, when the Korean War broke out. The communist government of North Korea invaded South Korea in June of that year, expecting a quick victory and unification of the country. The United States immediately decided to come to South Korea's aid, and the British, who had Munich in mind, felt that they had to support the Americans with ground troops as well as naval and air power. At the same time, British concern about Soviet military strength in eastern Europe was increasing. For these reasons, the

Attlee government doubled its estimates for military spending for the next three years. To pay for these defense increases, Attlee and Bevin insisted on cutting social expenditures. Aneurin Bevan heatedly resisted any reduction of social services and especially charges for prescriptions and eyeglasses provided through his beloved National Health Service. In 1951, in protest against the government's priorities, Bevan and two colleagues resigned from office. The split between leftist Bevanites and the center-right would keep the party weak and divided for the next decade.

With his government obviously faltering, Attlee called a general election in 1951 in hopes of obtaining a bigger majority in Parliament. His hopes went unrealized. Tired of austerity and controls, voters perceived Labour as having run out of ideas. The Conservative party accepted the welfare state, but promised more effective and efficient government and more free enterprise. The election of 1951 gave the Conservatives a small majority, and Churchill at age seventy-seven formed his second government.

THE TORY YEARS, 1951–1964

The Conservative victory in 1951 led to thirteen consecutive years in office. This political dominance was not due to Churchill's preeminence. In poor health, the hero of the Second World War found it increasingly difficult to keep on top of affairs. He retired in 1955 and after a long decline died in 1965. Meanwhile, the Conservative party after 1951 reaped the benefits of good luck. The left-right split kept Labour off-balance; at the same time a fall in world commodity prices temporarily benefited Britain's balance of trade. In 1952 Churchill's government was able to carry out a "bonfire of controls" and to preside over the beginnings of a period of economic growth that lasted through the 1960s. The consumer prosperity of the 1950s and early 1960s enabled the Conservatives to take credit for what seemed to be economic success and to ride out political disasters at home and abroad.

A broad-based commitment to the postwar consensus strengthened the Conservative party's hold on government during the 1950s. The party was able to convince the electorate that the welfare state was safe under Conservative administration. In 1949, the Conservative election manifesto had even claimed the welfare state as its own achievement: "The Conservative party has welcomed the new social services which it has done so much to create. We regard them as mainly our own handiwork." Churchill's successor Anthony Eden (1955–57) expressed the views of many Conservatives

when he placed the welfare state within the tradition of Disraelian “Tory Democracy”:

We are not a party of unbridled, brutal capitalism, and never have been. Although we believe in personal responsibility and personal initiative in business, we are not the political children of the laissez-faire school. We opposed them decade after decade.

Eden’s successors, Harold Macmillan (1957–63) and Sir Alec Douglas-Home (1963–64) did not disagree. Macmillan had worked to commit the Tory party to social reform and economic activism since the 1930s and Douglas-Home represented the old paternalist tradition of the landed gentry and aristocracy.

The Conservatives did remain more committed to economic competition than Labour and less convinced of the benefits of nationalization. Thus, Churchill’s government not only abandoned many wartime controls, but it also shifted the emphasis in housing policy from public (council housing) to private construction and denationalized the iron and steel and the road haulage industries. In addition, in 1954 it created the Independent Television Authority to provide some private competition to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

Nevertheless, the economic policies of R. A. Butler (1902–82), the Conservative chancellor of the exchequer from 1951 to 1955, did not differ sharply from his Labour predecessor, Hugh Gaitskell (1906–63). Commentators, in fact, coined the term *Butskellism* to describe the cross-party consensus: managing the economy for full employment through Keynesian demand management tools and oversight of nationalized industries. Conservative governments during this era sponsored a major expansion of the educational system, most notably at the university level. They also remained committed to the quasi-corporatism of their Labour predecessors. In 1961, for example, Macmillan’s government set up the National Economic Development Council (“Neddy”), which attempted to go beyond management to economic planning. It was to bring together government, business, and union leaders and to make expert projections on growth and modernization.

Overseas, too, the Conservatives observed the postwar consensus because they had to cope with the same shrinking of British power that had shaped Labour’s policies. As the traditional party of imperialism, the Conservatives did not face withdrawal from British commitments happily. They kept defense spending relatively high, even though the British economic base was falling behind that of other Western nations and Japan. Yet even

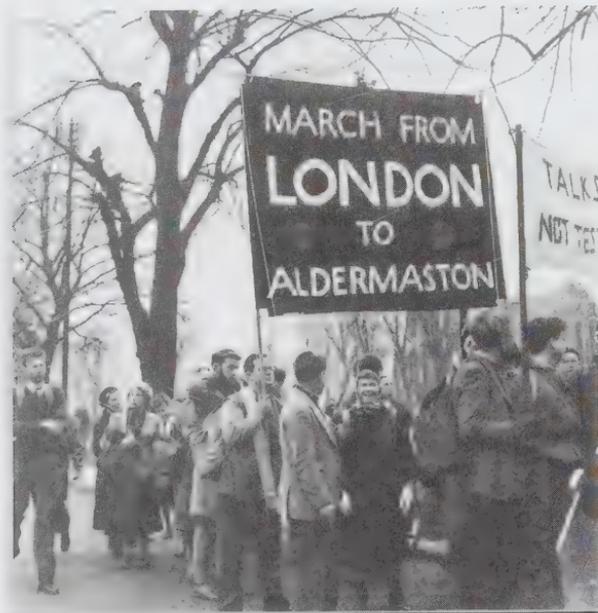
the high expenditures on defense could not keep the military forces at a high level of readiness on all fronts at once. The British army, radically cut from its 1945 level, was overstretched by the commitment to NATO on the European continent and to policing duties from Malaya to Egypt. The Royal Navy's *share* of defense spending increased throughout the 1950s and 1960s, but the real ability of the navy to protect the Commonwealth and transport army units to trouble spots declined, along with British economic clout in the world.

The Conservatives sought to compensate for the decline in military force by building a British hydrogen bomb as well as an independent delivery system. This was immensely expensive, but Conservative defense planners, like their Labour predecessors, thought that possession of the H-bomb would give Britain vast power more cheaply than conventional forces and provide a degree of influence with the United States, which was rapidly developing a huge nuclear armory to deter the Soviet Union. Macmillan, who hoped that the British would be able to play the role of the Greeks to the American Romans, said:

The independent [nuclear power] gives us a better position in the world, it gives us a better position with respect to the United States. It puts us where we ought to be, in the position of a Great Power.

The British tested their first H-bomb in 1957. It is doubtful, however, whether the bomb added to British power. As a government White Paper recognized in 1957, the Soviet Union could annihilate Britain with only ten H-bombs. Furthermore, the bomb was useless in defense of the colonies against nationalist guerrillas. Nor could Britain hope to keep up with the United States and the Soviet Union in developing delivery systems. The last British effort to build a ballistic missile ("Blue Streak") had to be cancelled in 1960, and the British had to depend on the United States for delivery systems—first Skybolt, which the Americans cancelled in 1961, and thereafter Polaris submarines. Meanwhile, it was the American nuclear umbrella that actually protected Britain from the Soviet Union. Nuclear weapons thus made Britain more, not less, dependent on the United States.

From the Conservative point of view, the biggest benefit of nuclear weapons may have been realized in domestic politics: the issue of the British bomb severely divided the Labour party. In the early 1950s various groups in the left wing of the Labour party began to agitate against the H-bomb. In 1958, anti-bomb activists founded the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) to urge Britain to drop out of the nuclear arms race. The CND was a



Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament on the March, 1958. *The first CND march in 1958 went from London to the Aldermaston weapons research facility. The campaign's leadership realized, however, that a march that ended in central London would generate much more publicity, and so in later years reversed the direction.*

broad middle-class movement, with strong roots in the Christian churches, but it included many Labour as well as Liberal intellectuals, among them philosopher Bertrand Russell, now in his 80s. The campaign's annual marches from the atomic research station at Aldermaston to Trafalgar Square in London attracted the support of thousands of idealists, as well as much attention from TV and newspapers. For the marchers, CND represented a reassertion of British moral leadership in the world at a time when British political leadership was declining.

The nuclear issue widened the split between the center-right and the Labour left over the future of socialism. The left insisted on further nationalization of industry and a commitment to socialist direction of the economy; the right, led by Chancellor of the Exchequer Hugh Gaitskell, resisted more nationalization and advocated a strong private sector in a mixed economy. Gaitskell was able to carry the majority of the party for his moderate policies, and after Attlee's retirement in 1955, to win the party leadership. The CND, however, exercised much influence with the left wing. Many leftists wanted the party to adopt the policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament. Gaitskell stoutly opposed this on grounds that it would require Britain to renege on most of its existing treaties and split with the United States. The Labour unilateralists won their point in the party conference of 1960, but Gaitskell, having vowed to "fight and fight and fight again,"

managed to reverse the decision in 1961. This swing of the policy pendulum shows that the Labour party was too divided to take advantage of its electoral opportunities.

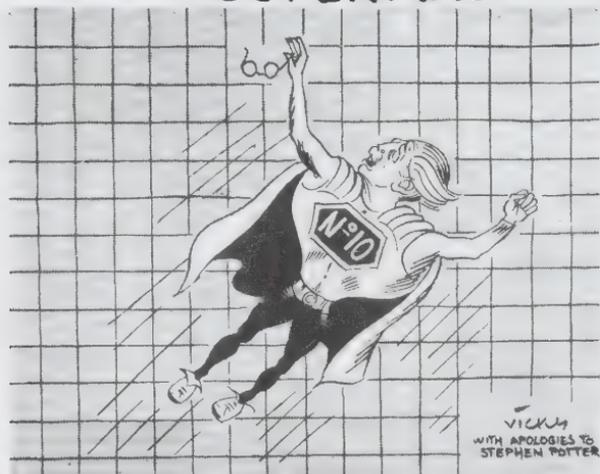
SUEZ AND AFTER

The best of those political opportunities came as a result of a disastrous effort by Eden's government in 1956 to retain by force British control over the Suez Canal. Suez, as the incident became known, both shocked idealistic Britons and revealed the truth about British weakness. The background to this sorry episode began in 1953, when nationalists in the Egyptian army led by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser overthrew Britain's puppet ruler in Egypt. Three years later, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company. The British saw this act not only as a test of British power, but also as a danger to British oil supplies from the Middle East.

British Prime Minister Anthony Eden overreacted to Nasser's seizure of the Canal Company. Churchill's heir-apparent since 1945, Eden was strikingly handsome and well spoken, seemingly the perfect product of Britain's "natural" ruling elite. Despite his years of experience in foreign affairs, however, he proved to be brittle and inept in the Egyptian crisis. He personalized Britain's struggle with Nasser, whom he wrongly equated with Hitler. "Nasser's got to go," he declared, "it's either me or Nasser." Thus, Eden began to plot with the French government to use force against the Egyptians. In October 1956, the British and French brought Israel into their conspiracy: the Israelis would attack Egypt, and the British and French would then intervene, allegedly to separate Egyptian and Israeli forces, but actually to occupy the Canal Zone. On October 31, the Franco-British invasion began, and the British and French achieved their immediate military objectives, though not before the Egyptians blocked the canal.

The Eden government, however, was not able to keep its winnings. British public opinion expressed outrage at the Suez operation. The Labour party had a field day in Parliament, and most newspapers opposed the naked use of force. Worst of all, the prime minister picked up the telephone and heard, "Is that you, Anthony? Well, this is President [Dwight] Eisenhower and I can only presume that you have gone out of your mind!" With the Soviet Union threatening a nuclear strike against the invading forces, the United States government made its displeasure known by encouraging a run on the pound sterling and blocking British efforts to borrow from the International Monetary Fund. The British had no choice but to withdraw from

INTRODUCING: **SUPERMAC**



HOW TO TRY TO CONTINUE TO STAY TOP WITHOUT ACTUALLY
HAVING BEEN THERE

NOTE: MAC'S TORSO IS, OF COURSE, PADDED

"Introducing Supermac" by the political cartoonist "Vicky," *Evening Standard* (London, 6 November 1958). The caption reads "How to try to continue to stay top without actually having been there. Note: Mac's torso is, of course, padded." Although intended to be satirical, the image of Macmillan as Supermac became largely positive.

Suez. The Suez debacle symbolized the end of British influence as a world power. Eden, already a very sick man, resigned from office in January 1957.

Strangely, Suez brought about neither a Labour government nor a fundamental reconsideration of British foreign and defense policies. Harold Macmillan, who followed Eden into office, turned out to be one of the most effective peacetime prime ministers in the twentieth century. With great talents for parliamentary maneuvering and public persuasion, and with a remarkable ability to project a calm, masterful image, "Supermac" restored the morale of the Conservative party and rode out the political storm. He also repaired relations with the United States. He enjoyed genuine friendships with Presidents Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy, and he regarded the special relationship with America as vital if the British were to maintain their commitments in the Pacific, the Middle East, and Africa.

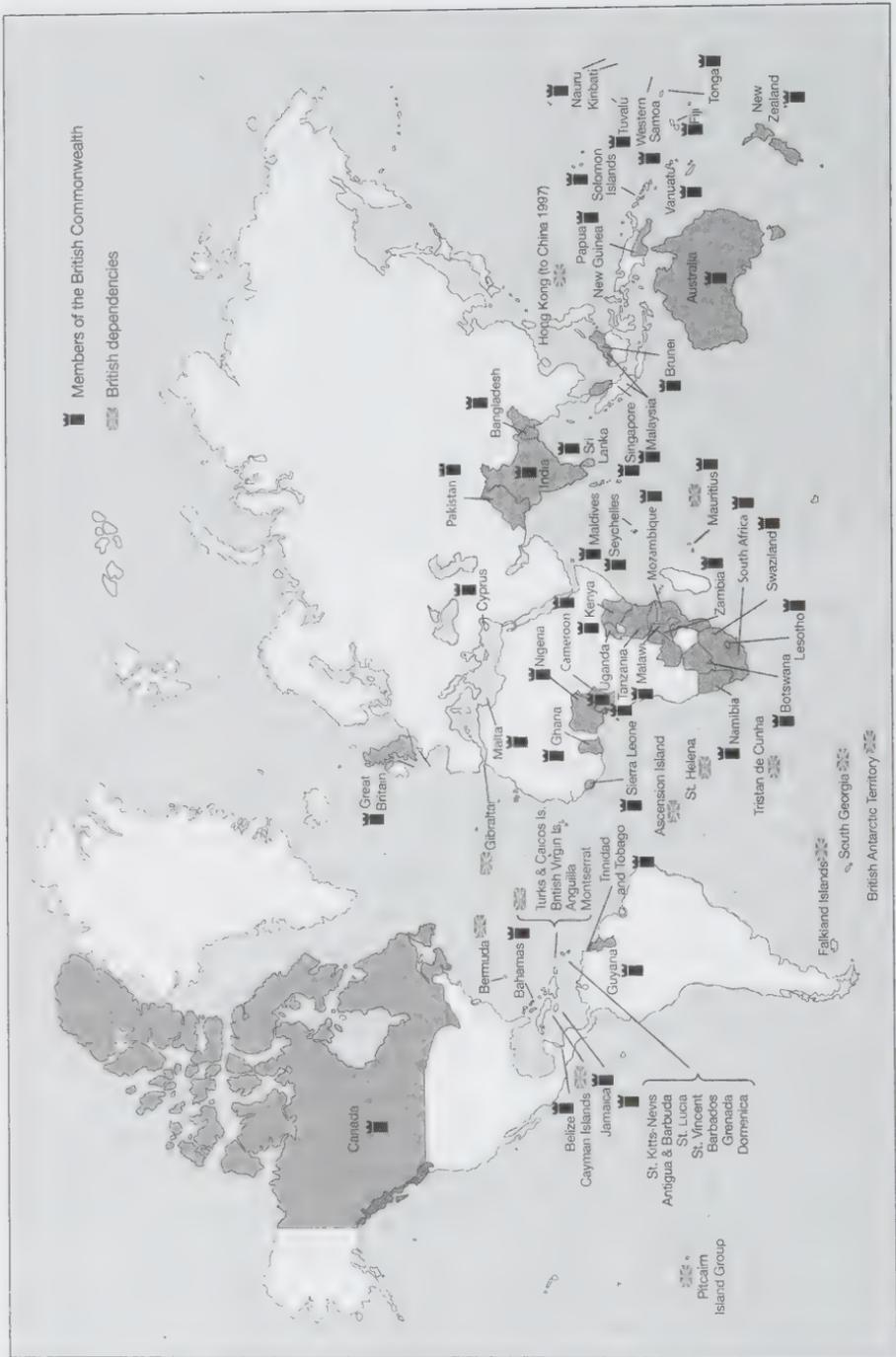
In each of these areas, however, the forces eroding British power were relentless. The Macmillan government's close ties with the United States did allow the British to buy time, but as Macmillan admitted in 1960, the "winds of change" were blowing too strongly for Britain to resist. Despite the Conservatives' efforts to hold on, the parade of British colonies winning independence became a stampede. By the 1970s British colonial holdings included little more than Gibraltar, Hong Kong, and the Falkland Islands.



Queen Elizabeth in Ghana, 1961. *At Her Majesty's right is Ghana's prime minister Kwame Nkrumah. Ghana was the first of many former African colonies to win its independence. Nkrumah moved directly from a British prison cell into government office.*

The story in each colony was different, but the general pattern tended to be the same. British governments recognized that they could not hold back the nationalist tide, but they tried to diminish its force by diverting it down channels of constitutional reform and systems of power sharing with pro-British elites. But when radical nationalists refused to contain themselves to these channels, the British opted for military force. In Malaya, for example, the British army fought a bitter war against insurgents from 1948 until 1955. During this Malayan “emergency” (the British never declared it a war), the British military developed the morally dubious tactic of *villagization* to cut off rebel supply lines; that is, the army moved civilians out of their villages into prison camps. When in 1952 the Mau Mau rebellion—a combination of nationalist insurgence, peasant uprising, and civil war—erupted in Kenya, the British turned to villagization on a massive scale. Forced removal and confinement, often without adequate food supplies and sometimes with beatings and torture, did little to persuade Kenyans to embrace British rule. In 1963, Jomo Kenyatta, imprisoned for seven years for his role in the uprising, became independent Kenya’s first elected leader. Like Kenyatta, many nationalists moved from British prison cells to prime ministerial or presidential office.

In south-central Africa, the British sought to sustain their influence and protect the white settlers there by setting up a bogus federation of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland. They hoped that the whites of Southern Rhodesia would control the whole, but the huge black majorities



The British Commonwealth and Dependencies, 2013. The British Empire is largely gone but the existence of the British Commonwealth bears witness to its continuing—and controversial—legacy.

of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland refused to accept this neocolonial arrangement. In 1963, after years of bloody demonstrations, riots, killings, and repression, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland left the Federation and in 1964 declared their independence as Zambia and Malawi. In 1965, Southern Rhodesia unilaterally declared itself the independent state of Rhodesia under a white supremacist government. The British government refused to accept this declaration of independence, and the situation in Rhodesia festered through the 1970s.

Rhodesia, however, proved to be an exception; despite the violence preceding their independence, many former British colonies moved surprisingly seamlessly into the Commonwealth. Yet this political success could not hide the failure of the Commonwealth to develop into an effective economic unit. With the chronic problems of relatively inefficient industrial production and balance of payments deficits weakening the British economy, already by 1960 Macmillan's government plotted a momentous shift in British policy: to turn from Empire to Europe, more specifically, to join the Common Market or European Economic Community (the EEC). Forerunner of today's European Union (EU), the EEC had been established in 1957 as a free-trade zone consisting of West Germany, France, Italy, and the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg). The British at first stood aloof from the EEC. British policy makers perceived of Britain as an Atlantic rather than a European power and Britain's economy had long been directed toward the Empire. By 1960, however, the explosive economic growth of western Europe suggested that Britain's future might be brighter in association with Europe. Those favoring an application to join the EEC argued that it would open up a vast "domestic" market for British industry and expose British companies to strong competition that would force them to become more efficient. In short, membership in the Common Market would give the British economy a healthy jolt.

Not surprisingly, the proposal for such a major shift in Britain's policies and orientation toward the world roused strenuous opposition. The far right of the Conservative party opposed joining the EEC because of their British nationalism and their sentimental ties to the Commonwealth. The Labour left opposed entry because they thought that the Common Market was a capitalist institution founded to perpetuate the Cold War and the arms race. Some of the more moderate Labourites, including Gaitskell, were concerned about the specific terms of entry and feared that membership might mean, as Gaitskell warned, "the end of Britain as an independent state."

In the end, the House of Commons voted in favor of applying for entry to the EEC by an overwhelming majority. The British thus applied for membership in 1961. French President Charles de Gaulle, however, was deeply suspicious of the British application. The EEC was constructed to be very favorable to the French economy, and he did not want the British to spoil these arrangements. Moreover, he believed that the British were not really ready to break their overseas and Atlantic ties, and thus that, if admitted, Britain would serve as a Trojan horse inside the walls of the EEC for Commonwealth and American interests. After protracted negotiations, de Gaulle vetoed British entry in 1963. This was an obstacle that not even Supermac could overcome.

LABOUR'S RECOVERY AND FALL, 1964–1970

Left directionless by De Gaulle's rejection of Britain's EEC application, Macmillan's government then found itself enmeshed in a tawdry scandal involving John Profumo, secretary of state for war, and a young model named Christine Keeler, who was having another affair at the same time with the Soviet naval attaché. This revelation came hard on the heels of several other security lapses, including the defection of Kim Philby, a British Secret Service officer who had been spying for the Soviet Union for many years. Macmillan resigned in 1963; referring to Keeler and her flatmate, Macmillan said he had been "brought down by two tarts." He was succeeded by Scottish aristocrat Sir Alec Douglas-Home. Formerly the fourteenth earl of Home (he resigned his title to retain his seat in the Commons), Douglas-Home was hardly the leader the Conservatives needed to navigate the enormous cultural changes of the Sixties.

The Labour party, meanwhile, was papering over the dispute between its left and right wings. Gaitskell died in 1963. To succeed him as party leader, the Labour MPs elected Harold Wilson (1916–95), who won support from both left and right wingers. The son of a factory chemist and a schoolteacher, Wilson attended Oxford as a scholarship boy and became an economist. After working as a government statistician during the war, he entered the House of Commons in 1945, and became the youngest cabinet minister in 1947. Wilson resigned from the cabinet with Bevan in 1951 over the issue of favoring defense over social services, thereby winning the reputation of being a left-winger. In fact, however, Wilson was a technocrat, interested far more in technical problem solving than in political ideology. He was also by nature a manipulator and compromiser—a born politician.



The Beatles and Harold Wilson. *By linking himself with pop culture icons such as the Beatles, Wilson sought to maintain an image of modernity.*

By law, Douglas-Home had to call an election no later than 1964. In the electoral contest of that year, he proved an ineffective campaigner, ill at ease in television appearances and uncomfortable with domestic issues. He lost some credibility when he said he “did his sums with matchsticks.” He seemed something of an aristocratic fuddy-duddy. Wilson, on the other hand, was a clever speaker, excellent on television, and obviously a master of facts and figures. He spoke frequently of modernizing Britain, emphasizing not socialism but science, technology, and efficiency. He promised to spur a second industrial revolution and to transform Britain by “the white heat of technological change.” The result was a narrow victory for Labour.

Harold Wilson’s government from 1964 to 1970 proved to be extremely frustrating to the members of his own party. His technocratic rhetoric and his own self-image had led supporters to expect radical changes. Wilson liked to appear the economic expert and to compare himself with the late John F. Kennedy. In reality, he exercised no more power over the economy than his predecessors and fell far short of Kennedy in style and glamour. Preferring a presidential approach to governing, Wilson largely ignored senior civil servants and his own cabinet officers, and relied instead on a *kitchen cabinet* that included some friends, a pair of economists, and his political secretary. Consequently, his cabinet rarely discussed significant policies and turned into a sullen and quarrelsome group.

More important in causing the troubles of the Wilson government were the economic problems it inherited. Wilson failed to attack the country’s underlying weaknesses in industrial production and became trapped by the twin symptoms of the “British disease,” inflation and balance of payments deficits. Faced with a rapidly escalating balance of payments deficit in 1964–65, Wilson adopted a series of stopgap measures to slow imports: budget cuts, import surcharges, restrictions on installment buying, and increases

in the interest rate. In 1965, he set up the National Board for Prices and Incomes (NBPI) to work with companies and unions alike, with the aim of holding back price and wage increases until justified by improvements in productivity. That same year the Wilson government published a National Plan, which declared that economic growth should be 3.8 percent per year. The economy, however, did not respond to government goals as if they were commands.

Wilson's economic measures in 1964 and 1965 earned the government enough support to warrant a fresh general election. In the election of 1966, the Labour party won a majority of ninety-six seats over all other parties combined. Yet the brute facts of economics continued to bear down, and by mid-1966 a mounting trade deficit caused another sterling crisis. Wilson attempted to improve British industrial efficiency by renationalizing the steel industry and by establishing the Industrial Reorganization Corporation (IRC) to encourage smaller companies to merge into bigger ones. Industrial efficiency did not improve. In 1967, Wilson admitted defeat and devalued the pound by 14 percent. This was the first of three crushing blows his government received in the years between 1967 and 1969.

The second blow was rejection of a new application to join the Common Market. Wilson had never been enthusiastic about joining the EEC. But by 1967, he and other influential members of his government had concluded that the National Plan would not work and that Britain was running out of options. Like Macmillan a few years earlier, Wilson now argued that EEC membership would increase the efficiency and technological progress of British industry and attract investment into Britain. In May 1967, therefore, Britain made its second bid to join the EEC. But once again, de Gaulle vetoed the British application.

Wilson's third major defeat was the collapse of his policy for improving industrial relations. Conflict between workers and management had long hobbled British industry. In the latter half of the 1960s, as prices rose, so did workers' demands for higher pay, and so also did the frequency and severity of industrial disputes. The number of strikes, for instance, rose by almost 50 percent between 1967 and 1969. Britain's record in strikes was worse than that of any major industrial nation except the United States. Most of the British strikes were unofficial, many the result of interunion jurisdictional disputes or workers' desires to maintain traditional wage differentials or work rules. To bring strikes under control, the Labour government laid out a set of reforms in a White Paper entitled *In Place of Strife*. The plan called for the removal of legal immunity from unofficial strikes and mandatory

votes by a union's membership when the leaders of that union considered calling a strike. The union movement rose up in protest and killed the bill. The Labour government, dependent as it was on trade union support, had little choice but to give way.

Wilson's government was hardly more effective in foreign and imperial affairs. The prime minister declared in 1965 that "Britain is a world power, a world influence or she is nothing." In fact, economic weakness continued to make Britain subservient to American policy. Wilson maintained the British nuclear force (Polaris submarines, purchased from the United States) and was dragged into support of American policy in Vietnam, which escalated into a major war in 1965. Wilson and his cabinet to a degree shared the American concern about communist expansion in Southeast Asia, but the left wing of the Labour party was very unhappy about supporting the United States. Wilson could only try to walk a tightrope between his own party's criticism of the Vietnam War and American power to strangle the pound sterling. He attempted to mediate between the United States and the Soviet Union, but this laudable intention came to nothing because British power over the situation was an illusion.

Dependence on the United States also caused the Wilson government trouble on the issue of maintaining military bases east of Suez. Until the mid-1960s, despite the departure from India, Britain kept a significant military and naval presence in the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf. The United States had long been hostile to the British Empire, but the Cold War transformed American priorities. American officials now pressed the British to keep up their worldwide commitments in order to help counter the expansion of Soviet power. The British, however, could no longer afford a global role. In 1967, after a vigorous parliamentary debate, the Wilson government decided to end British commitments east of Suez and thus to pull out of Singapore, the Indian Ocean, Aden, and the Persian Gulf. The Americans and the conservative Arab sheikdoms were unhappy with the British decision, but increasingly Wilson and his successors focused their defense strategies on Europe.

The continuing Rhodesian crisis most vividly highlighted the ineffectuality of Wilson's government. The white minority population that controlled Southern Rhodesia composed less than 5 percent of the Rhodesian population. The British did not try to force majority rule on Rhodesia, which was still formally a British colony, but they did press the whites to make progress in that direction. As we have seen, in 1965 the government of Rhodesia, determined to defend white rule, declared independence from Britain.

Already, in 1961, South Africa had left the Commonwealth on the same issue. The new nations in the Commonwealth urged the British not to yield to the white Rhodesians; the very existence of the Commonwealth was threatened. Wilson refused to recognize Rhodesian independence without Rhodesian commitment to progress toward majority rule, but at the same time he renounced the use of force and so had little bargaining power. He managed to hold the Commonwealth together, but his Rhodesian failure severely damaged Britain's standing with the Commonwealth and the developing world.

THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 1970

Despite the reversals suffered by many of his key policies, Wilson seemed to enjoy substantial public support. Critics argued that he sacrificed long-term strategies for short-term tactics; nevertheless, he stood higher in public opinion polls than the Conservative leader, Edward Heath (1916–2005). The winner of the Conservative party's first-ever leadership election in 1965, Heath was a self-made man rather than an heir to broad acres—and like Wilson, a technocrat. He was also something of a cold fish and did not poll very well with potential voters. Thus, when early in 1970 the balance of payments showed a temporary improvement, Wilson called a general election. During the campaign, the Conservatives attacked Labour's record on the economy and highlighted the increasing number of strikes, rising inflation, and growing unemployment. They did not offer much of a program of their own, but they threw Wilson on the defensive. Still, the electoral swing against Labour surprised all observers; the Conservatives won a majority of thirty seats over all other parties.

At the time observers explained the election results as simply a natural swing of the pendulum against the ruling party and toward its opponents. In retrospect, however, the election revealed that the postwar political consensus was beginning to unravel. The turnout of voters was comparatively light—only 72 percent of the eligible voters went to the polls, a very low total for Britain. The electorate expressed little enthusiasm for either major party. Labour party membership, which had peaked in 1957, had declined and now included only slightly more than half of all trade unionists. Within the working class, disillusionment with the party was very strong, for Wilson had inspired and then disappointed such high hopes. Many young working people were drifting away to the New Left and other socialist

groups. In the Conservative party, the far right, led by Enoch Powell, expressed restlessness with Heath and the mainline Conservatives, on grounds that the party leaders were not sufficiently opposed to immigration and the permissive society and not enthusiastic enough about free enterprise. In these shifts of attitudes, born in the atmosphere of decline and economic malaise, were the beginnings of the polarization that was to mark the 1970s and 1980s.

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Chapter 30

The End of Consensus, 1970–1990

The 1970s marked a turning point in modern British history as rising inflation and unemployment, as well as growing industrial conflict, tore apart the postwar consensus. As we have seen, the consensus consisted of public agreement on the welfare state and the guarantee of full employment via nationalization of key industries, Keynesian demand management, and a corporatist partnership between the government and the trade unions. This consensus broke apart under the strain of economic decline and rising social tensions. Politics became polarized. Labour moved to the left, Conservatives moved to the right, and third parties emerged to fill the gap and to express popular frustration with the course of affairs. The chief political beneficiary of these developments was Margaret Thatcher, who was herself an adamant opponent of consensus. She became prime minister in 1979, the first woman premier in British history. By dint of her strong ideas and personality and her eleven consecutive years in office, she put her stamp on the nation more firmly than any peacetime prime minister in the twentieth century.

ENTERING THE POSTINDUSTRIAL AGE: ECONOMIC TROUBLES AND CULTURAL CRISIS IN THE 1970s

In the early 1970s, economic crisis engulfed not just Britain, but the entire western world. By 1975, the average annual economic growth rate in Western Europe was zero, and unemployment in many regions was approaching the double digits. Yet prices were also rising at an unhealthy rate. To describe this new grim reality, economists adopted a relatively new word, *stagflation*—the high inflation rates of an economy in overdrive combined with the high unemployment rates of economic stagnancy. As economies contracted, social and racial tensions escalated. For example, in West Germany, workers in the 1970s went on strike at three times the rate of the 1940s, with almost four times as many working days lost as a result.

A number of factors contributed to this rather sudden end to postwar affluence throughout the West. To finance the Vietnam War, American policy makers opted for inflation rather than high taxation rates; the diminishing value of the dollar destabilized economies around the world. The rising price of oil, linked to the Yom Kippur War between Israel and the Arab states in 1973 and the subsequent Arab oil embargo, also pushed inflation rates skyward. But perhaps the most important explanation for stagflation is that, by the 1970s, western economies were in the midst of a systemic shift from industrialism to *postindustrialism*. Four developments characterized this shift: (1) the transformation of energy resources, with coal giving way to oil, natural gas, and nuclear power; (2) the migration of manufacturing to developing economies in Asia and South America, where lower wage rates and fewer workers' rights ensured higher corporate profits; (3) greater mechanization in those factories that remained in the West so that industrial jobs tended to be fewer, less skilled, lower paying, and often part-time; (4) the expansion of the largely nonunionized service sector of the economy, where the jobs again tended to be less skilled, lower paying, and often part-time. Thus, the once abundant, relatively highly paid, skilled working-class jobs in the heavy extractive and manufacturing industries disappeared from many Western cities. For many workers, particularly working-class men, stagflation translated into shattered expectations.

Britain fared worse than most Western states during this dismal decade. As we have seen, even during the Age of Affluence, the British economy grew less rapidly than that of the other main industrial powers. Significantly, the first recorded use of the term stagflation comes from Britain—and from 1965 rather than 1975. In a speech criticizing the Labour government, the Conservative party's economic spokesman Iain Macleod said, "We now have the worst of both worlds—not just inflation on the one side or stagnation on the other, but both of them together. We have a sort of 'stagflation' situation."

During the 1970s, the "British disease" worsened. Recall the symptoms: poor management, restrictive trade unions, and antagonistic labor relations led to underinvestment and low productivity, which in turn triggered balance of payment and sterling crises. From 1973 on, the British had an *overall* payments deficit of visible and invisible goods and services, for their earnings on invisibles such as international finance and insurance could no longer make up the gap between imports and exports of tangible goods. Inflation, moderate throughout the 1960s, now became a serious problem.

By 1975, Britain's inflation rate stood at 20 percent, the highest in Western Europe. Unemployment, which the British thought they had relegated to the bad old days, crept back in, with the jobless rate at 7 percent between 1974 and 1979. Rising prices plus rising unemployment made up a formula for rapidly worsening industrial relations. Workers sought to keep manning levels high and to raise wages in order to keep up with prices; managers resisted the workers' demands in order to keep manufacturing costs down. Strikes became more frequent and lasted longer than in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, the number of workdays lost because of strikes in industry tripled over the previous decade. The British rate of days lost per worker was twenty-five times as many as the West German.

The 1970s, then, provided overwhelming evidence of the British disease; it is important, however, to set Britain's economic woes within a larger comparative and historical context. The first nation in the world to industrialize, Britain was also the first to endure the painful transition to postindustrialism. In the 1970s, it was not just the British disease that made times so tough for so many people. It was also the disappearance of an entire way of life. About 690,000 British men delved in coal mines in the 1950s; this number dropped to 60,000 by the early 1980s. Only 29 percent of the British work force worked in the industrial sector in the 1980s, compared to nearly 50 percent in the 1950s. The growing number and ferocity of strikes reflected not just workers' frustration with rising prices and the growing threat of unemployment, but also their desperate—and doomed—struggle to preserve an economic order that had once guaranteed them security and even prosperity.

Popular culture reflected the growing sense of disaffection and malaise. "In the summer of 1976," a music historian wrote, "punk rock exploded out of working-class sections of London like a pent-up howl of rage."¹ Since the late 1960s, British rock music had grown increasingly sophisticated in both lyrics and musicianship. Progressive rock of the early 1970s featured lengthy songs, often complete with separate movements just like symphonic music, and lyrics drawing on medieval literature, religious texts, and modernist poetry. Many members of bands such as Genesis and King Crimson came from middle-class backgrounds. Punk rock reacted against this middle-class takeover of rock music. Punk musicians rejected the complexity of progressive

¹Edward Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counter-culture* (New York: Oxford University Press), 179.

rock and instead championed a raw, energetic, do-it-yourself style—short, angry songs with short, angry lyrics that perfectly expressed working-class frustration and fear. Hence, the Sex Pistols warned, “There’s no future no future no future for you;” Joy Division shouted, “I can see only walls”; and the Clash mocked the lack of opportunities in the no-longer affluent society:

They offered me the office, offered me the shop
 They said I’d better take anything they’d got
 Do you wanna make tea at the BBC?
 Do you wanna be, do you really wanna be a cop?

To accompany the staccato beat of the music, punk fans adopted an aggressively proletarian style. Whereas the Teddy Boys of the 1950s and the Mods of the 1960s had mocked middle-class values by spending outrageous sums of money on expensive clothes, the punks played with the stereotype of the thuggish worker: heavy working boots and ripped denim, with dog collars and chains added to drive the point home.

Although punk culture horrified many observers, it did not pose a fundamental challenge to the social and political order; such was not the case with the revitalization of British feminism in the 1970s. British feminists, many of whom were associated with the New Left in the late 1950s and 1960s, realized that the advances toward equality for women had not gone far enough. Many also felt that the sexual revolution had resulted in the sexual objectification of women, and that society’s norms and expectations for women were too limiting. Hence, they consciously tried to resurrect the “heroic” militancy of the pre-1914 suffragettes and to eradicate the deep cultural roots of female oppression. They established strong movements against rape and wife battering.

Germaine Greer (1939–), one of the leading feminist polemicists, argued that the new objective of the women’s movement had to be a revolution in gender relations. In *The Female Eunuch* (1970), Greer channeled her anger into an attack on gender stereotypes and on the means of their social construction. She contended that in capitalist society women were taught to be both the big spenders and the emblems of big spending; thus, they were made into servile and thoughtless sex objects. Greer’s assaults on Freudian psychoanalysis, myths of love and marriage, popular romance fiction, and the image of the female in male literature provided a full agenda for a generation of British feminists.

Like feminism, the new environmentalism of the 1970s also challenged the very fundamentals of postwar society, particularly the belief that “bigger is better.” Although environmentalism, in the sense of saving a particular

species or cleaning up a particular lake had long existed, only in the 1970s did a holistic movement emerge that linked the postwar obsession with economic growth to the degradation of the natural world and the decline of human community. In Britain, the work of economists E. J. Mishan (1917–) and E. F. Schumacher (1911–1977) helped shape a multifaceted critique of the postwar economic order. Mishan’s and Schumacher’s ideas were based in romanticism and religion—in the ideas that there are higher values than materialism and that humanity should practice proper stewardship over God’s creation instead of exploiting and wasting it. Schumacher’s best-seller, *Small Is Beautiful* (1973), drew attention to the destruction of the world ecosystem by rampant greed and technology. Schumacher urged that people liberate themselves from false assumptions that all economic growth is good and that technology always makes things better. Perhaps it can be argued that, as a citizen of a country afflicted by low growth, Schumacher was making a virtue of necessity. Yet his solutions—appropriate technology and what he called, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, “Buddhist economics”—were (and are) eminently sensible.

In 1972, the world’s first Green party formed in Britain (although it did not adopt the name *Green* until 1985). The advent of Green politics, not only in Britain but across Western Europe, signaled widespread discontent with the postwar political and social order. In Britain, the “first-past-the-post” parliamentary system limited the influence of all third parties, including the Greens. During the 1970s, however, the dominance of the two main political parties lessened. As economists, politicians, businessmen, and trade unionists flung accusations at each other, the postwar consensus unraveled. British politics tended to become more ideological than usual. As we will see in chapter 32, Scottish and Welsh nationalists pushed their own claims, and Northern Ireland became locked in a bitter war of terror and counterterror. Britain appeared to many to be ungovernable. These were the conditions in which successive British governments had to operate.

THE HEATH GOVERNMENT, 1970–1974

The general election of 1970, which revealed the first signs of the decline of consensus, brought to power the Conservatives under Edward Heath. A self-made man devoted to industriousness and efficiency, Heath hoped to make Britain into a more competitive, hustling nation like the United States. Like Macmillan, Heath believed that capitalism did indeed have an “unpleasant and unacceptable face” that had to be softened. Yet he

also believed that his party had been “returned to office to change the course and the history of the nation.” Speaking for a grassroots turn inside Conservative circles against the Butskellite policies of the 1950s and 1960s, Heath wanted to reduce government intervention in the economy and to reemphasize capitalist enterprise. Above all, however, the new prime minister wanted to lead Britain into the Common Market, which he thought held the solution to Britain’s economic woes.

In his first two years in office, Heath pursued what have come to be called neocapitalist policies. He sought to restore the competitive edge to British industry and to rein in the unions. Thus, he declared his government would not subsidize failing companies and, with the National Industrial Relations Act of 1971, outlawed both sympathetic strikes and any strike that sought to alter a contracted work agreement. Most importantly, Heath denied that the state has a valid role in determining wages and prices, and so his government abolished Wilson’s National Board for Prices and Incomes.

Soon, however, economic crisis forced Heath to change course, to execute a humiliating U-turn, as his critics called it. A series of debilitating and disruptive labor strikes—dockworkers, mailmen, sewage workers, and trash collectors—punctuated his first eighteen months in office and culminated with a coal miners’ and electricity workers’ strike at the end of 1971. The House of Commons had to meet by candlelight, factory assembly lines shut down, and traffic lights did not function. Inflation surged upward and a rise in jobless rates looked likely. On the road to economic chaos, Heath chose to U-turn. To save jobs, he ordered a massive bailout of a faltering shipbuilding company; to rein in inflation, he mandated a ninety-day freeze on wages and prices, followed by the creation of a state council to rule on all claims for both wage and price increases. Although such a council might in theory seem rational, in fact it involved the government in the nightmarish task of distinguishing fair claims for wage increases from unfair ones. Heath’s U-turn showed that the neocapitalist approach was in shambles.

Meanwhile, Heath pressed on with his ideal of gaining British entry into the Common Market. As he had written some years earlier, he believed that only membership in the European Economic Community (EEC) could make Britain efficient and competitive once again:

We must pursue a policy which will enable Britain to become a member of an enlarged European Community. Technological advance is making nonsense of national boundaries. Britain’s future lies in a larger grouping and that grouping should be the Europe of which the Common Market is already the nucleus.

The right wing of the Conservative party, led by Enoch Powell, opposed Heath on the Common Market, on a variety of practical and emotional grounds. The Labour left had always opposed entry, and now the party as a whole opposed Heath, a rather cynical move given that Wilson's government had applied for membership just four years earlier. Despite this opposition, Heath carried a Commons resolution favoring entry in 1971 and embarked on negotiations with the European Community (EC) countries.

This time the British application was not to be denied. General de Gaulle had resigned the presidency of France in 1969, and his successor, Georges Pompidou, put up no major obstacles. Britain officially signed the EEC Treaty in January 1972 and became a member on January 1, 1973. Although EEC membership did not immediately transform the British economy or convert the average provincial Briton into a worldly European, entry into the Common Market was one of the most significant events in modern British history. It symbolized the turn of Britain away from its traditional role as a world power, away from empire and Commonwealth, and away from its special relationship with the United States. It symbolized acceptance by the British of their new status—that of an ordinary European state.

Entry into the EEC was Heath's one major victory. His moment of triumph did not last long, for the oil crisis resulting from the Arab-Israeli war began in October 1973. To raise world oil prices and so to force Britain and other Western nations to abandon their support for Israel, OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) began cutting oil production. Britain imported two-thirds of its oil from the Middle East and therefore suffered severely from the more than threefold increase in the cost of oil imports. Inflation, already a serious problem, became acute. British coal miners chose this moment of crisis to demand higher wages. They realized that, with oil prices going through the ceiling, Britain needed all the coal they could produce. The ensuing miners' strike, the most serious industrial conflict since 1926, led Heath to declare a state of emergency—the *fifth* in less than four years! To cut fuel consumption, Heath mandated a three-day work week, outlawed the heating of shops and offices, and ordered television stations to stop broadcasting at 10:30 p.m.

Recoiling from this chaos, many Conservatives argued that the unions were not only wrecking British industry, but they were also thwarting the plans of a democratically elected government and so threatening Britain's political stability. Heath agreed and in 1974 called a general election for the

end of February. He asked voters to give him a mandate to end union power to influence political decisions. The election, he said, would answer the question of who rules Britain. The electorate's reply was less than decisive: Labour won 301 seats to the Conservatives' 296. Perhaps most significant was the general unhappiness with both major parties: the Liberals, Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National party (SNP), and the Ulster Unionists all took votes from the Conservatives and Labourites, who between them won only 75 percent of the total. The February election meant that Labour had to form a minority government; after a second election in October, Labour obtained a slight majority but it relied on an agreement with the Liberal party—the Lib-Lab pact—to pass legislation. Under the pressure of economic crisis, the two-party system and the postwar consensus were fragmenting.

THE LABOUR GOVERNMENTS, 1974–1979

In the second half of the 1970s, Labour attempted to restore the consensus; continuing economic failure and labor union militancy doomed this attempt. Following the general election of February 1974, Harold Wilson became prime minister for the second time. He remained in office until 1976, when he retired, apparently from the weariness he felt in the face of Britain's seemingly intractable economic and social problems. His successor as party leader and prime minister was James Callaghan (1912–2005), who represented the center and right of the Labour party. Although more popular than Wilson with Labour's rank and file, "Sunny Jim" essentially continued Wilson's policies until 1979, when his government fell to a no-confidence vote in the House of Commons—the first time this had happened since 1924.

Neither Wilson nor Callaghan was able to resolve the key problems of underinvestment and union militancy. Wilson's government set up the National Enterprise Board (NEB), a state corporation to lend money to failing industries and acquire some companies outright. Instead of pursuing a long-range industrial investment program, however, the NEB spent its funds mainly in bailing out sick companies such as British Leyland (the largest British-owned car manufacturer) and British Chrysler. British investment per employee remained one-third that of West Germany and one-fourth that of Japan. The best that can be said of the NEB is that it kept a number of companies afloat and prevented unemployment from becoming worse than it was.

The Labour governments' record of reining in the unions proved even worse. During the election campaign of 1974, Wilson promised that he would both beat back inflation and end disruptive strikes through a social contract with the trade unions. The unions pledged to moderate their wage claims in return for the government's promise to improve welfare programs and to promote *industrial democracy*—that is, workers' influence in running their industries. With the social contract, then, Wilson attempted to restore the postwar consensus by formalizing the process of consulting with the unions that had long been a prominent part of it. Once he took office, Wilson settled the coal strike on the miners' terms, repealed Heath's Industrial Relations Act, and gave up the Tories' income controls. Soon, however, wages were going up faster even than prices, which approached a 20-percent annual inflation rate. Naturally the trade deficit climbed, and pressure on the pound sterling grew. Wilson's cabinet was forced to cut government spending, including social services. Yet the problem worsened. In 1976, to prevent the collapse of the pound sterling, the Labour government (now under Callaghan) negotiated a loan with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that was the largest loan in the IMF's history to that point. The terms of the loan required more cuts in social spending.

The Labour government had thus violated the social contract, and the unions responded in kind: they headed back to the picket lines. Industrial unrest peaked in 1979, Britain's "winter of discontent." In the midst of exceptionally cold temperatures and abundant snow, oil tanker and delivery truck drivers went on strike. Fuel shortages and panic buying ensued. Then the public sector employees rose up. Garbage men, hospital porters, school janitors, ambulance drivers, grave diggers, and crematorium workers all headed off the job. As the trash piled up in the streets and the corpses in the morgues, public anger—at the unions but also at the Labour government—grew.

In March 1979 Callaghan lost a vote of confidence in the House of Commons. The subsequent general election was a decisive defeat for Labour, which won only 269 against the Conservatives' 339, and 27 seats for the third parties. The era of consensus politics was over.

THATCHER AND THATCHERISM

The election of 1979 brought to power an outspoken opponent of the postwar consensus, Margaret Thatcher (1925–2013). "For me," she once announced, "consensus seems to be the process of abandoning all beliefs,



The Winter of Discontent. Towering piles of rotting garbage on the streets of London came to symbolize the Seventies to many people.

principles, values and policies." To her mind, the Age of Consensus included permissiveness as well as compromise. In place of full employment, the mixed economy, the welfare state, and the conciliation of the trade unions, Thatcher advocated, in the words of one historian, "markets, monetarism, and authoritative government."² To be sure, Thatcher could never have ended the age of consensus by herself: the nation's revulsion from stagflation and anger at union militancy put her in office and mobilized opinion in her favor. Nevertheless, her combative leadership had an immense impact, for better and for worse, in altering the framework of British politics and society.

²Kavanagh, *Thatcherism and British Politics*, 2.



Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. *The first woman prime minister in Britain, Thatcher held office from 1979 to 1990—longer than any other prime minister of the twentieth century.*

Thatcher somewhat unexpectedly became Conservative party leader in 1975. After Heath led his party to two general election defeats in a single year, many Conservatives became restless. Those anxious for his departure cast about for a candidate to run against him, but none of the likely successors wanted to be seen as disloyal to the party leader. The person who stepped forward was Margaret Thatcher, who had served in Heath's cabinet as minister for education, but was not regarded as a real contender. She was expected to win enough votes to persuade Heath to step down and then stand aside for someone else. Thatcher, however, quickly impressed party backbenchers with her forthrightness and right-wing ideology, and she not only defeated Heath but also won the party leadership for herself. The Conservatives, the party of old-fashioned values, thus were the first major British party, in fact the first major western European party, to have a woman as leader—a step made easier for them by the fact that she was not herself a feminist. Thatcher was to lead the Conservative party aggressively in the direction that Heath had taken initially but then abandoned.

Thatcher's policies derived first of all from her family background. Born in the small market town of Grantham, the daughter of a grocer and ardent Methodist, Thatcher believed in ordinary middle-class values: the self-made person, individualism, and conventional morality. She always insisted that running a country was just a larger version of running a grocery store or managing a family budget. After a grammar school education she went to

Oxford, graduated with a degree in chemistry, became a lawyer, and went into politics—showing remarkable determination and industriousness every step of the way. She first entered parliament in 1959, when her twins, Mark and Carol, were just six years old. Women MPs were very unusual in 1959 and married women MPs even more unusual, but a married woman MP with young children at home was a downright phenomenon. Thatcher negotiated her path brilliantly. She took advantage of the extra publicity that her unusual status brought her, and she was careful to present herself as wife and mother in a traditional family. Even as prime minister, Thatcher fixed breakfast for her husband—and she made sure everyone knew it.

Thatcher brought to politics a belief in ideas. Not for her were the customary British ways of compromise and muddling through. Instead, she both benefited and participated in a swing to the right in Tory ideology that began in the 1960s and gathered steam in the 1970s. Thatcher was first attracted to the ideas of Enoch Powell, who had advocated control of immigration into Britain and a return to free-market, laissez-faire policies as early as the 1950s. Even more important were the ideas of two other free-market economists in the 1970s—Austrian expatriate Friedrich A. Hayek and American academic Milton Friedman, both of whom rejected Keynesian policies and inspired a bevy of Conservative think tanks. Hayek and Friedman provided the scholarly confirmation for Thatcher's gut instincts: the market, not the government, must decide; the individual, not society, mattered.

Shortly after Thatcher became Conservative party leader in 1975, people began to talk about *Thatcherism*. Thatcherism represented the triumph of the middle-class business wing over the traditional, paternalist, landed gentlemen in the Conservative party. But more fundamentally, Thatcherism constituted a rejection of the central features of the postwar political consensus: (1) the universally available, cradle-to-grave welfare state; (2) nationalization of key industries; (3) the use of Keynesian demand management to ensure full employment; and (4) the corporatist practice of government-trade union wage and price agreements. Thatcher never denied that the poor and disabled should be cared for, but she believed that the postwar welfare provisions sapped individual initiative and responsibility. She also did not think that the government could play an effective part in directing the economy. As an advocate of free enterprise, she believed in *privatization* (selling off nationalized industries). And as a *monetarist*, she believed that the only valid economic tool of government is control of the money supply.

Crucially, Thatcher identified inflation, not unemployment, as the enemy of democracy. She argued that, by diminishing the value of the money in a person's pocket or savings account, inflation restricted his or her economic freedom and whittled away at moral values. Inflation, she said, "destroyed the faith of many people in some of our traditional ways of life, in being independent, in being thrifty and saving for a rainy day." Thatcher recognized that British governments before hers had tried to battle inflation, but she believed they had chosen the wrong weapons. They had used wage and price agreements, which gave trade unions far too much political power and which constituted unwarranted state interference with the free market. Thatcher proposed to scrap corporatist negotiations along with Keynesian economics. A convert to Milton Friedman's monetarist theories, she insisted that only by restricting the money supply would a government squeeze inflation out of the economy.

Although Thatcher denied the state much of an economic role, Thatcherism was not libertarianism. Thatcher believed in individual self-reliance, but she also advocated social order and strong government in the areas in which she thought that government had a proper role to play: national defense, law and order, and public morality. Although forced to cut defense spending on conventional forces, including the Royal Navy, she insisted on maintaining Britain's independent nuclear deterrence by purchasing Trident submarines from the United States. Furthermore, she supported the American policy of installing medium-range and cruise missiles in Europe, and of ramping up the Cold War. As for law and order, Thatcher was unable to persuade Parliament to restore the death penalty, nor did she roll back the increase in the crime rate. She succeeded, however, in a major buildup in the size of the national police force. She encouraged the development of a nationwide police computer network, which some critics regarded as a threat to civil liberties. Along the same line, she forbade certain intelligence installations to be unionized and sponsored the expansion of the scope of Britain's law controlling national security, the Official Secrets Act. In these efforts, as well as her tendency to lecture people on their behavior, Thatcher sponsored the development of what her critics called a "nanny state."

The nanny state aspect of Thatcherism was also reflected in its centralizing force. Thatcherism did not embrace local governmental power; instead, it greatly expanded the control of the central state over regions and localities. Suspicious of local governments, many of which were in the

hands of Labour or Liberal councilors, and eager to control the flow of funds, Thatcher oversaw the passage of more than fifty acts of Parliament that restricted local governmental autonomy and—often by default rather than intent—consolidated power in the hands of the central state.

Thatcher's political style was almost as important as her ideas in defining Thatcherism. From her earliest days as prime minister, she adopted a very aggressive stance in the cabinet, the House of Commons, and the nation. She knew her own mind and did not hesitate to scold her colleagues or the public. She was quick to judge her fellow Conservatives according to whether they were *for* her neocapitalism (the "Drys") or *against* (the more paternalistic "Wets"). Though extremely articulate, she sometimes became overbearing and bullying in her speeches. She never enjoyed the great personal popularity of, say, a Churchill or a Macmillan. Opponents never tired of calling her names such as "Attila the Hen," "the Iron Lady," and "the Abominable Hairdo." Nevertheless, she won respect and support from a significant segment of the British public because of her resolution in trying to reverse what she regarded as Britain's disastrous march into socialism and into the second or third rank as an international power.

In this battle, Thatcher benefited tremendously from a factor completely outside her control: the impact of North Sea oil on the British economy and especially on the British pound sterling. Oil had been discovered in the North Sea off the Dutch coast in 1959, but the first commercially sound oil field off the Scottish coast was not discovered until 1970 and the first British oil was not produced until 1975. Thatcher came into office in 1979 at precisely the moment that oil was beginning to gush through Britain's economy. Between 1979 and 1985, for example, the taxes on North Sea oil generated £52.4 billion for the British Treasury. Self-sufficiency in oil gave Thatcher economic wiggle room denied to every preceding prime minister since the First World War.

THATCHER'S FIRST GOVERNMENT, 1979-1983

Thatcher came into office in 1979 determined to slay the dragon of inflation with the monetarist sword, and only the monetarist sword. By refusing to set prices and wages, she would restrict the government's role in the economy. By refusing to negotiate with trade unions, she would restrict their power. By letting unemployment rates rise, she would let the free market do its work. And by limiting government borrowing (a key aspect of controlling the money supply), she would rein in spending on the welfare state.

Monetarism in theory, however, proved simpler than monetarism in practice. As Thatcher and her ministers struggled to figure out what exactly constituted the money supply and how a government controlled it, the inflation rate continued to climb, from 10 to 22 percent during Thatcher's first year. By the middle of 1983, however, the rate was down to 4.5 percent. The defeat of inflation was Thatcher's proudest claim, yet monetarism had little to do with it. Instead, Thatcher and her chancellor of the exchequer, Geoffrey Howe, turned to Keynesian demand management: they deflated demand through high interest rates and by doubling the VAT (the value-added tax—a tax on consumption, similar to a sales tax). Thatcher, however, never acknowledged this covert U-turn, and only historians seem to have noticed.

What everyone did notice was that the high interest rate caused massive unemployment. Interest rates as high as 20 percent diverted investment from industry and kept the exchange value of the pound sterling high, which in turn hurt Britain's exports and dealt a fatal blow to many firms and factories. Whole industrial areas such as the Clydeside of Scotland, the north and the west Midlands of England, and the coalfield of South Wales were idle. Industrial production dropped by 11 percent between 1979 and 1983. In 1983, for the first time since the early nineteenth century, Britain imported more manufactured goods than it exported. Unemployment reached 13 percent of the work force in 1988—and was much higher in certain areas. In Greater Manchester, for example, it hit 32 percent. Joblessness was certainly a factor in driving down demand and prices; Thatcher's strongest anti-inflationary weapon, in fact, may have been her willingness to see millions of people out of work for month after month. With the numbers of jobless higher than at any point since the Great Depression, Thatcher came under great pressure to reflate the economy, but she stood firm. Playing on the title of a well-known play (Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not for Burning*) she declared, "This lady's not for turning."

Thatcher did not "turn," but British cities began to burn. The spring and summer of 1981 saw the worst outbreak of civil unrest in Britain since 1919. The riots began in Brixton, a poor inner-city area in southern London. Over the next few months the violence spread to other parts of London and to other cities such as Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool. Thatcher shrugged off the unrest and pressed ahead with her agenda. Her initial budgets cut unemployment benefits, reduced spending on social security and education, and, by abolishing automatic cost-of-living increases, cut the effective value of old age pensions.

It was, however, in the areas of housing and immigration that legislation passed by Thatcher's first government made its most dramatic impact. In 1979, public rented housing (council houses owned by the local government or local council) accounted for over 30 percent of all housing in Britain. Thatcher wanted to slash this percentage, which she regarded as clear evidence of a "dependency culture." The Housing Act of 1980 required local governments to sell off council houses to willing tenants at a substantial discount and prohibited local authorities from using the money from the sales to construct any more public housing. The results transformed almost every city neighborhood in Britain. Over the next three years, five hundred thousand houses moved from the public to the private sector—but as the numbers of homeowners climbed, so, too, did the numbers of homeless.

The second important piece of legislation passed by Thatcher's first government was the British Nationality Act of 1981. The economic crisis of the 1970s had worsened race relations in Britain (and throughout Western Europe). Mass immigration seemed an easy explanation for mass unemployment and people with black or brown skin easily identifiable scapegoats. Thatcher herself had long opposed nonwhite immigration. "We are a British nation with British characteristics," she insisted. "People are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture." By rejecting the principle established in 1948 that all citizens of the Commonwealth enjoy British citizenship and the related "right of abode" in Britain, the British Nationality Act aimed to halt the immigration of people of color. At the same time, the act granted most Commonwealth citizens of British descent (and therefore, in most cases, white) the lifetime right to migrate to Britain.

By the beginning of 1982, Thatcher seemed destined to be a one-term prime minister. High interest rates, continuing industrial disputes, soaring unemployment, and worsening racial tensions all explain why opinion polls rated her lower than any prime minister since polling began. Popular culture reflected and reinforced this anti-Thatcher sentiment. In 1980, The Beat released a popular song called "Stand Down, Margaret." A year later The Specials used the still quite new genre of the music video to offer a powerful critique of Thatcherism. One of the ska revivalist groups of the 1980s, The Specials fused Jamaican-based ska with punk in a lively and often upbeat blend. In the video "Ghost Town," however, the band vividly articulated the disastrous impact of Thatcherist policies on many cities by driving through eerily empty city streets in a 1956 Vauxhall Cresta:

Government leaving the youth on the shelf
 This place, is coming like a ghost town
 No job to be found in this country
 Can't go on no more
 The people getting angry.

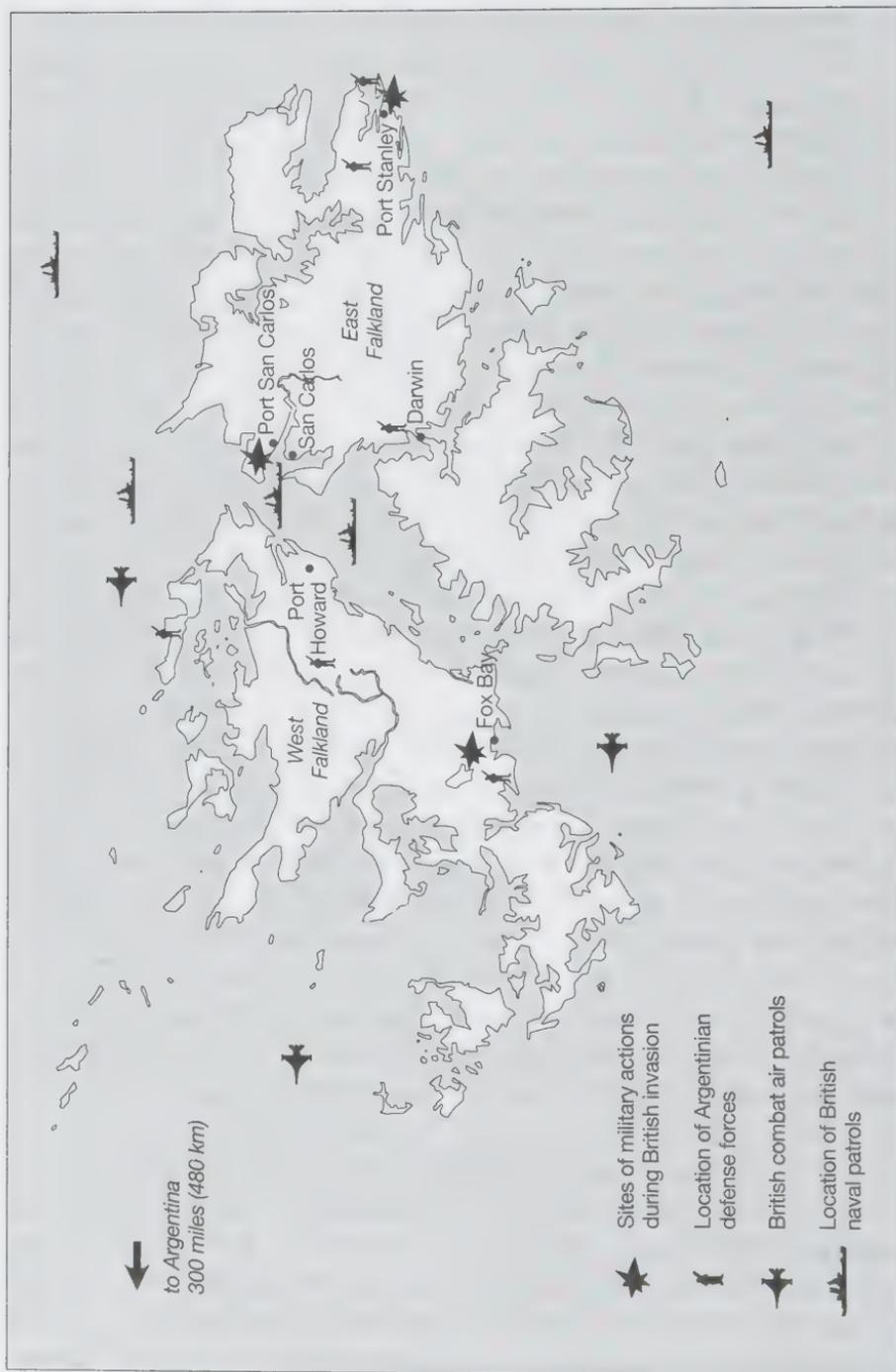
The Conservatives seemed set to lose the next election.

But in the spring of 1982, events in the Falkland Islands, a small British-held archipelago in the wind-swept South Atlantic, shifted the course of British politics. Argentine forces seized control of the Falklands on April 2. Although the Falklands were of little value to Britain, and although the days of Britain's imperial glory were long over, Thatcher decided to retake the islands by force.

Britain and Argentina had long disputed ownership of the Falklands, on which resided 1,800 people, 650,000 sheep, and 10 million penguins. The Argentines pointed out that the islands lie only 250 miles from Argentina but 8,000 miles from Britain. The British countered that the Falklands' inhabitants wanted to remain British. In 1982, the Argentine military dictator, General Galtieri, decided to settle the dispute by occupying the islands—and so, he hoped, divert public opinion in Argentina from the sorry record of his inept and oppressive regime. Little did he realize that he was saving Thatcher's political career or that Thatcher would be the ruination of his.

Thatcher handled the Falklands crisis in a way that pleased the great majority of the British public. She insisted that the use of force had to be stopped by force. Despite recent cutbacks in the Royal Navy (which had encouraged Galtieri to believe his move into the Falklands would not be resisted), she assembled a task force to retake the islands. Meanwhile, after British forces set sail, Thatcher cooperated with the Americans and then with the United Nations in their attempts to mediate the dispute. Galtieri, however, would not compromise. These diplomatic efforts won essential American support for Britain. The British task force arrived at the Falklands early in May 1982.

The war lasted six weeks. During the month of May, the British ships fought a desperate battle with the Argentine air force. The British navy was not prepared for this kind of combat and lost six ships to Argentine bombs and air-launched missiles. British submarines, however, sank the Argentine cruiser *General Belgrano* and kept the Argentine navy bottled up in port. Thus, British troops were able to land in the Falklands on May 21. These highly professional forces routed the Argentine occupying troops, who were vastly superior in number but only raw conscripts. On June 14, the



The Falklands War. Mounting a sea-borne land invasion several thousand miles from British shores proved to be a colossal logistical task.



British Royal Marine commandos raise the Union Jack over West Falkland Island, 1982.

Argentine commander surrendered his 12,500 men. Some 950 men had been killed, of whom 250 were British. The campaign cost the British about \$1.3 billion, or about \$750,000 per Falkland Islander.

At home many Labourites, the churches, and the quality press criticized Thatcher for fighting an expensive colonial war when the Empire no longer mattered. But the great majority of the British public felt real patriotic pride in the fact that the old British lion still had some teeth after all. Moreover, it was easy for the public to work up hostility to Galtieri, who was an especially loathsome dictator. (He fell from office not long after the war.) “Our Maggie” consequently enjoyed a powerful surge of popular approval, and the British for a time forgot about inflation, unemployment, and industrial decline.

FROM THATCHERISM’S ZENITH TO THATCHER’S FALL, 1983-1990

Thatcher seized the rise in her popularity to call a general election in June 1983. Victory in the Falklands was a major element in the campaign, but perhaps an even greater factor was disarray among the opposition. The failure of the Wilson-Callaghan governments between 1974 and 1979 and the subsequent rise of Thatcherism caused a major split in the Labour party. The Labour governments’ changes of policy on incomes, trade unions, and

the EC had disgusted many party supporters. Moreover, many left-leaning party activists were angry at the failure of the parliamentary leadership to follow the commands of the annual party conference. Labour's defeat at the polls in 1979 eroded the strength of moderates, while radically left-wing elements grew strong in some local party organizations and trade unions. By 1980, the Labour party was ripe for a change in both its leadership and its constitution. Hence, when Callaghan resigned the leadership in 1980, the MPs elected Michael Foot (1913–2010), a disciple (and biographer) of Aneurin Bevan. Under Foot's leadership, Labour accepted a series of radical left-wing policies including unilateral nuclear disarmament, withdrawal from the EC, and a comprehensive program of nationalization of industry. In 1981, the conference altered the party constitution to strengthen the influence of local constituency party associations over MPs—a change that handed power to local activists, who tended to be more extremist than the average party member. The new leader and new constitution represented a sharp turn of Labour away from the political consensus the party had done so much to construct.

The shift to the left was too much for some of the party's moderates. Led by four former cabinet ministers, including Roy Jenkins, thirteen Labour MPs left the party and formed a new one, the Social Democratic party (SDP) in 1981. The SDP stood for a mixed economy, the welfare state, and full employment—that is, the post-1945 consensus—plus membership in the EEC. The SDP soon formed an alliance with the Liberals, who had elected eleven MPs in 1979. Within a few months the SDP/Liberal Alliance ranked higher in the polls than either Labour or the Conservatives. For once, it seemed that a third party in Britain had a great chance of success.

But the Falklands War reversed the decline in Thatcher's popularity, and the deep animosity between Labour and the SDP/Liberal Alliance guaranteed a Tory electoral victory. In the election of 1983, the Conservatives substantially increased their majority seats, even while their proportion of the popular vote decreased slightly. The Alliance suffered a big disappointment, winning 25.4 percent of the votes but only 23 seats (to Labour's 27.6 percent and 209 seats—an illustration of the way the first-past-the-post system favored the two main parties).

Emboldened by her triumph, Thatcher pressed on with her battle to reorient British political culture and social values. Her second term in office in many ways saw the triumph of Thatcherism. In three areas, in particular, Thatcher made a significant mark during her second government: the financial sector, the unions, and nationalized industries.

Under Thatcher, “the City” (London’s version of Wall Street) regained its position at the top of the global economy. Early in her first government, Thatcher and her chancellor Geoffrey Howe (1926–) had taken the dramatic step of abolishing currency exchange controls. Since the Second World War began, British governments had regulated the movement of capital to maintain the value of the pound. Abolishing exchange controls thus meant a sharp break with the postwar consensus and a leap into financial free market on a global scale (a leap, though, that came with the safety harness of North Sea oil, which now helped keep the pound strong).

The next step after the abolition of exchange controls was the Big Bang of October 27, 1986, when Thatcher and Howe broke wide open the London Stock Exchange by allowing in foreign firms, replacing the old “open outcry” system of trading with electronic on-screen deals, and eliminating the regulations that had sought to discourage corruption by separating jobbers (those who created markets for stocks) from stockbrokers and traders (those who bought and sold them). The Big Bang transformed the City. Ten-minute transactions now took ten seconds. The elite family firms and old boy networks now faced new competition as not only traders from abroad, but also ambitious working-class men and women jumped into this new risk-filled world. By 1987, the City’s volume of trading was fifteen times higher than it had been in the early 1980s. By the 1990s, more foreign-exchange transactions took place in London than in any city in the world. With banks from seventy-six countries active in the City, London became more of an international city than ever before, while massive new housing, retail, and leisure developments for all those wealthy bankers and brokers revitalized much of the capital.

Northern industrial cities, however, continued to decay as unemployment rates remained devastatingly high. Unemployment provided the backdrop for the second focus of Thatcher’s second government: the unions. Unemployment increased union militancy; it also, however, helped Thatcher deplete the union movement of members and momentum. Thatcher was determined to gut trade union power. Together, the Employment Acts of 1980 and 1982 and the Trade Union Act of 1984 removed many weapons from the union arsenal. Unions now had to pay for damages resulting from unlawful strikes, strikers could picket only at their own place of employment, a secret ballot had to be taken before any strike action, and four-fifths of the workers in the company had to approve a *closed shop* (in which only union members could work).

Just as important as this legislation, however, was Thatcher’s very public showdown with the miners, which highlighted her complete repudiation



The Miners' Strike of 1984. *The miners' defeat marked a key moment in the decline of trade union power in Thatcher's Britain.*

of corporatism and the politics of consensus. Thatcher insisted that the National Coal Board abandon inefficient pits, even at the expense of greater unemployment. The leader of the miners' union, the National Union of Mine Workers (NUM), was Arthur Scargill (1938–), a strong socialist determined to spark a major battle with Thatcher. He and the NUM executive called a strike in the spring of 1984 to stop pit closures. Unfortunately for Scargill, the miners were not united. The pit closures affected the older mining regions of Scotland, South Wales, and the North of England, but not the more efficient mines in the English Midlands. In Nottinghamshire, miners refused to obey the union's call to lay down their tools. The NUM sent *flying pickets* (mobile strikers) to shut down the Nottinghamshire mines—which played directly into Thatcher's hands. As serious fights between picketers and police broke out in the summer and fall of 1984, her government was

able to argue that it was only defending the right of the Nottinghamshire miners to work. The NUM executive further blundered by calling the strike during the spring and summer, when coal demand was lowest. In contrast, Thatcher's government had prepared carefully for the showdown by gathering ample stocks of coal to keep industry and power plants running. In March 1985, the NUM admitted defeat. Altogether, the strike of 1984–85 was the most serious defeat for the British trade unions since 1926.

Perhaps, though, the most important force in breaking the power of the unions was not legislation or the miners' defeat, but rather the postindustrial transformation. As the economy shifted from manufacturing to service industries, and as unemployment grew, trade union membership declined from 12.1 to 9 million. By 1990, only 37 percent of the adult workers in Britain belonged to trade unions, as opposed to 51 percent in 1979. Whatever the causes of this decline, the erosion of union power was a key feature of the Thatcher years and particularly her second government.

The third touchstone of her second term was privatization. The Thatcherites believed that state-run industries were inefficient and that the nation's economy ought to depend on free enterprise once more. As one Tory said of nationalized industries in 1982: "Look, we're bloody fed up with them. They make huge losses, they have bolshie unions, and they are feather-bedded." It was not until her second government, however, that Thatcher was strong enough to embark on full-scale privatization.

It is important to remember just how large an undertaking this was. When Thatcher came into power in 1979, the state directly owned 40 percent of Britain's economic output and indirectly controlled even more—from shipbuilding firms and car companies to airlines and railways to coal mines and nuclear plants to hospitals and old people's homes. Thatcher did not privatize all of this, but she made a start. From 1984 on, her government sold off many nationalized companies and even whole industries, including British Telecom, British Gas, British Airways, British Petroleum, and Jaguar cars. Privatization reduced the nationalized industries' share of the economy from 10 percent to 6 percent of the GDP. It also raised billions in cash, which the government used to balance the national budget. This windfall profit from the sale of public assets, plus earnings from North Sea oil, gave Britain a surplus in the national budget in the 1980s and temporarily ended the perennial balance of payments crises. In the South of England, the economy prospered; as a result, the average British income rose by 35 percent between 1983 and 1987.

The election of June 1987 gave Thatcher an unprecedented third consecutive victory. In her campaign for reelection, she called for a continuation of Thatcherism—free enterprise, monetarism, privatization, and reduction in government spending—so that it would become so well established as to be irrevocable. The voters gave Thatcher a majority of 101 seats over all other parties combined.

Labour, however, made something of a comeback, winning 20 more seats than in 1983 and dealing a decisive blow to the Alliance's hope of replacing Labour as The Opposition. Labour's strong showing owed a great deal to the party's reorientation over the previous four years. By 1987, many leading British Labourites were redefining their philosophy to reemphasize individual freedom. As one socialist wrote, "The true purpose of democratic socialism is the protection and extension of individual liberty." This shift in Labour's outlook enabled the party to recover its position as the chief opposition to the Conservatives, but it also reflects Thatcher's enormous impact in changing the terms of British political discourse.

Despite her triumphant victory in 1987, Thatcher fell from office less than four years later. Her fall was as dramatic and unexpected as her rise, for parliamentary leaders in her own Conservative party rather than the Labour opposition deposed her. Thatcher had never been very popular in personal terms, and by November 1990 public opinion polls showed that the Conservatives under her leadership were running far behind the Labour party. A number of Conservative leaders feared that, if Thatcher were not replaced, the party would suffer a defeat in the next general election, which by law had to be held by summer 1992. These Conservative MPs, many of whom were either present or former members of Thatcher's cabinet, succeeded in turning her out of office in November 1990.

Three factors combined to sow the fast-growing seeds of discontent with Thatcher. One was her customary high-handedness with her own cabinet. Not only had she expelled the Wets from office, but she also ruled her cabinets with an iron hand. She always insisted on giving the last word in cabinet discussions, on interfering with decisions in the various executive departments, and on bullying her colleagues into silence. By autumn 1990, she had created a long list of bitterly resentful ex-ministers. Sensing that Thatcher had to go, such Conservative leaders began jostling with each other in hopes of replacing her at the top.

The second issue was the poll tax (officially called the community charge) which she had insisted on passing in 1989 and which had provoked strong public protest, including a riot in London in the summer of 1990.

The poll tax was a blow at progressive taxation. Traditionally, local taxes in Britain were based on property values, which meant that well-to-do families paid more than poorer ones. Thatcher preferred a flat tax, in which each member—men, women, and children over eighteen years of age—of every household in a community would pay the same amount. Thatcher hoped that dependence on this new method of taxation would cut the spending of local authorities, many of whom were under the control of Labour. After the poll tax went into effect, many families owning considerable property enjoyed a reduction in their local taxes, but the majority of families found that their taxes went up, often way way up. Popular anger over the tax was enormous. A number of Conservative leaders believed that the poll tax had to be abolished, but Thatcher was determined to keep it.

Finally, the Conservative parliamentary leadership grew increasingly unhappy with Thatcher's stance on Europe. Although Thatcher had voted in favor of British entry into the EEC in 1973, she was never a pro-European. She thought that Britain's links to the United States mattered far more than its ties to Europe, and she tended to equate the EEC's bureaucracy with the socialism that she was trying to defeat at home.

During her first and second governments, Thatcher fought a much-publicized battle with other EEC leaders over Britain's contribution to the European budget. By the end of the 1970s, Britain contributed about £1 billion more to the Community than it received back in economic benefits as a result of two factors. First, the EEC had been designed to assist the large (and relatively inefficient) Continental agricultural sector; about 70 percent of its annual budget was paid out in subsidies to farmers. Britain, however, had an efficient agricultural sector and so benefited comparatively little from these subsidies. And second, member nations paid into the EEC treasury according to the value of imports—and Britain imported many foodstuffs. Thatcher's refusal to let the EEC move forward on any other issue until it resolved the budgetary issue to her satisfaction poisoned her relations with other European leaders, but played well with much of the British public.

By the late 1980s, however, Thatcher's increasing *Euro-scepticism* alarmed many business and financial leaders, and many within her own party, who believed that Britain's future lay in Europe. Most of the states of the EEC, led by West Germany and France, wished to accelerate the pace not only of economic but also of political unification. They wanted to renegotiate the original Treaty of Rome, take the final steps in abolishing all internal European customs barriers, strengthen the EEC's central political and administrative institutions, and move toward a common European

currency, a central European bank, a European parliament, and a common European defense force. They wanted, in other words, to move ahead toward a genuine European Union. Thatcher, however, fiercely opposed the entire concept of European Union. She always regarded the EEC as simply a common market, a free-trade zone in which capitalist enterprise could flourish. She viewed anything more as a threat to British sovereignty. To abandon the pound sterling, that symbol of British power and influence, for a single European currency over which the British would have little control, struck her as a form of treason. But many big businessmen and financiers contended that European economic union was the only way to stimulate and streamline the British economy, and many Conservatives believed that, if Britain failed to participate in the drive toward union, it would slip to the periphery of European, and global, affairs.

By November 1990, the movement to replace Thatcher as leader of the party had grown very strong among Conservative insiders. By party rules, Conservative MPs had to reelect Thatcher as leader of the parliamentary party. Much to Thatcher's astonishment, she discovered she would not win the election. On November 23, 1990, she announced her withdrawal as a candidate for the leadership, which was effectively her resignation as prime minister. In the jockeying for position that followed, Thatcher's protégé, John Major (1943–), emerged as the victor. He was sworn in as the new prime minister on November 28, 1990.

THATCHER'S BRITAIN

Margaret Thatcher had an immense impact on Britain. The elections of 1983 and 1987 provided evidence that important economic and social changes were occurring, and Thatcher both contributed to and benefitted from them. Beyond returning the Conservatives to power, the elections exposed a number of fundamental features of Britain in the 1980s. First, they demonstrated that there were in geographical terms *two* Britains. The Conservatives won in the South and Southeast, the Midlands, and East Anglia of England. Labour won in the North of England, in Scotland, and in Wales. The geographical pattern of the voting thus coincided with the dominant economic division of the country in the 1980s and early 1990s: roughly speaking, the prosperous South of England against the impoverished North of England and the Celtic "fringe." The southern part of England, including high-tech corridors near Oxford and Cambridge, had a thriving economy dominated by financial and service-oriented businesses. The old industrial

areas of Northern England and the Celtic countries stood idle. In some of the formerly great industrial cities such as Belfast, Glasgow, Merthyr, Liverpool, and Manchester, unemployment among young people reached 50 percent. There was a significant flow of population out of these areas into southern England, especially the London area. The Highland districts of Wales and Scotland long ago began to suffer depopulation and by 1980 were home to very few people. In the 1980s, only 9.3 percent of the British people lived in Scotland, 5 percent in Wales, and 2.7 percent in Northern Ireland.

Second, the elections of 1983 and 1987 revealed important changes in the social structure. The middle class now comprised about 40 percent of the population. This expansion resulted in part from the shift of Britain's economy from manufacturing to service industries, which increased the proportion of middle-class to working-class jobs. Moreover, Thatcher's policy of privatizing nationalized industries increased the number of stockholders (20 percent of the British people now owned shares in companies), and her policy of selling council houses increased the number of families who owned their homes (66 percent of all families owned rather than rented). Both of these changes can be seen as increasing the number of middle-class people. This expanded middle class no longer, however, formed a solid Conservative bloc. Those in the private sector tended to vote Conservative, whereas public employees and professional people tended to vote Alliance or Labour.

The working class, meanwhile, seemed to be in a state of flux. By 1990 only about 37 percent of the British workers belonged to trade unions, and of these fewer than half voted for the Labour party in 1987. Indeed, only about 42 percent of the working class as a whole voted Labour, the rest dividing themselves between the Conservatives and the Liberal-SDP Alliance. The two key institutions of the British working class, therefore, the unions and the Labour party, seemed to be losing their hold on their constituency, which itself was declining as a portion of the population. Did these changes mean that the working class was dissolving or that the class system—that central creation of modern British history—was breaking up? Certainly patterns of consumption and popular culture seemed to be producing a homogenized social structure, just as they tended to erode the significance of different regional and local cultures within the British Isles. Inequalities of wealth and income still existed, but had been reduced over the course of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, a strong sense of social hierarchy, supported by a highly stratified educational system, the “public school tie,” and the domination of key positions in government and industry

by the Oxbridge elite, still pervaded Britain. Public opinion polls showed that class identity and class consciousness remained very strong; thus, what was changing may simply have been the political allegiance of the middle and working classes, the issue being whether to return to the old postwar consensus or to stick with Thatcherism.

The elections of 1983 and 1987 pointed to yet another important social development: the continued growth of the immigrant population of peoples from Asia and the West Indies—and of their British-born children and grandchildren. Four minority candidates won seats in the House of Commons in 1987. They hardly constituted evidence of a social revolution, but they were a reminder that about 2.2 million nonwhites by 1990 lived in Britain, about 4 percent of the total population of 55 million. They were concentrated in major English cities such as London, Birmingham, Leicester, and Bradford and tended to cluster in the shopkeeping and public transportation work forces. In London, a large mosque was built near Regent's Park, and a number of old Christian churches in the cities where immigrants had settled were converted into mosques and temples. Muslims of Asian descent outnumbered Methodists in Britain by two to one.

Thatcher's Britain seemed in some ways a more aggressive, forward-looking country than the Britain admired by generations of American tourists—the Britain of quiet market towns, cozy villages, and well-mannered Londoners—but it was also a more harsh and divided society. The division between the prosperous South of England and the impoverished old industrial districts of the North and the Celtic countries was startling, but so too was the division between the haves and the have-nots even in the prospering South. Parts of London were developing rapidly: Victorian districts “gentrified” again, high-tech companies sprang up all over the greater London area, and splendid new postmodern shopping malls and condominium developments grew up along the Thames. Yet in London in the 1980s one also saw images of the other Britain: unemployed men sleeping on the steps of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields church in Trafalgar Square; homeless people living in pasteboard boxes under Waterloo Bridge; and most ironic of all, impoverished children huddling under the theater marquee where *Les Misérables* was playing.

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Chapter 31

Post-Thatcher Britain, 1990–2014

Thatcher's Britain, in all its complex mixture of decay and progress, was not the creation of Margaret Thatcher alone. It was the consequence of the breakup of the post-World War II consensus, the decline of the industrial sector of the economy, the growth of financial and technical services, and changes in the social structure that blurred the lines of class. Still, there is no question that Thatcher's electoral victories and the perceived successes of her policies of privatization, controlling the trades unions, and encouraging an entrepreneurial culture all shifted the center of the British political spectrum a couple of notches to the right. One political commentator labeled Thatcher's successors as prime minister—John Major, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, and David Cameron—as “Thatcher's Boys.” Despite the derisory subtext, the label accurately highlights the continuing legacy of Thatcherism in post-Thatcher Britain.

THE TROUBLED TIMES OF JOHN MAJOR, 1990–1997

Shortly after John Major became prime minister in 1990, Thatcher declared herself to be “a very good back-seat driver.” Clearly, one of Major's tasks would be to mark out an independent position for himself. In a sense, he never did emerge from Thatcher's imposing shadow, and she and her anti-European disciples in parliament persistently split the Conservative party. But this was not the only difficulty that Major faced in his unusually turbulent and trouble-filled term of office. It must frequently have seemed to him that the gods were conspiring against him and Britain as the end of the millennium approached.

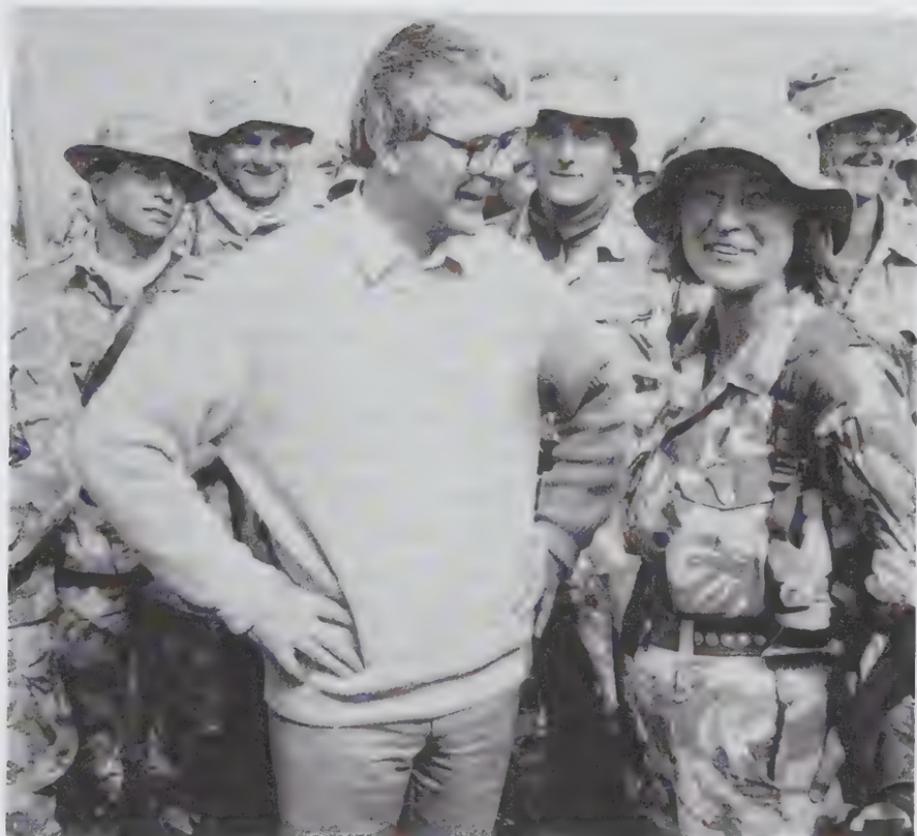
Only a person as resilient and resourceful as Major could have managed the discordant developments as long as he did. As a politician, he lacked vision and charisma, but he liked and understood people, and he was a clever and effective negotiator. His rise to the premiership was unusual—almost accidental. Born into the lower-middle class, Major grew up in a

tough inner-city section of London and left school at sixteen. He genuinely believed in equality of opportunity and a classless society. His only other fixed idea in political policy was concern about inflation, which he understood to have hurt his father in the 1960s. A tireless and conscientious party worker and a quick study on the job, he entered Parliament in 1979 and in the 1980s rose through a series of government offices in which he caught the eye of Mrs. Thatcher. Colorless and efficient, he was never in any office long enough to get the blame for bad mistakes. Hence, he was a convenient and noncontroversial candidate to replace Thatcher when the more powerful Conservative politicians had canceled each other out.

When Major took office in 1990, the Conservative party was in disarray and stood low in public opinion polls. Not even the Persian Gulf War, in which Britain followed the lead of the United States in a smashing victory over Iraq, gave Major much of a boost. The problem was that Britain suffered seriously from the worldwide recession of the early 1990s. Unemployment, inflation, and the balance of trade deficit had all risen. British industry had contracted during the Thatcher years, and much of what was left could not compete with American, European, and Japanese industry.

Like his predecessor, Major focused on inflation as the main economic problem, and he fought it using her methods—high interest rates, which drove exports and investments down and unemployment up. His efforts to hold down increases in public spending resulted in the serious underfunding of social services, including the National Health Service (NHS). Still, his policies did squeeze inflation out of the economy. By the mid-1990s, economic growth figures were rising again and Major could take credit for an unemployment rate of 6.7 percent—lower than that in any other European country. But in that figure of 6.7 percent, we see the particular success of Thatcher's revolution: at no time in the 1950s or 1960s would an unemployment rate of nearly 7 percent have been regarded as anything but an economic failure and a social tragedy. Thatcherism had transformed Britain's political culture by making unemployment acceptable.

Although far less divisive and aggressive than the Iron Lady, Major actually "out-Thatchered" Thatcher in his policies toward both the unions and privatization. By banning the closed shop, he stripped trade unions of one of their last vestiges of power. He also abolished the Wages Councils. Created by Lloyd George in 1908, these councils had set minimum wage rates in nonunionized jobs for eighty years. In the area of privatization, Major ventured into realms that Thatcher had always decreed too politically dangerous: coal and the railways. After several years of pit closures, the coal indus-



Prime Minister John Major talks with a BBC correspondent in the Persian Gulf following the Anglo-American success in the Persian Gulf War.

try moved into the private sector in 1994. Even more controversial was the transformation of British Rail, a long underfunded but much relied upon service, into twenty-five different private passenger lines, plus separate private companies for the various customer services, stations, and even the track. Few rail passengers found the resulting chaos to be anything of an improvement.

As difficult as the privatization of British Rail turned out to be, it seemed simple compared to dealing with the European Community (after 1993, the European Union, or EU). The question of European unification threatened to tear apart the Conservative party and seriously weakened Major's government. As we have seen, Thatcher's growing hostility toward Europe led her parliamentary colleagues to remove her from power; this dramatic action did not, however, unite either the Conservative party or the general public behind the idea of an economically and politically unified Europe. Thatcher herself played an important role in strengthening the

forces of Euroscepticism. Once freed from the constraints of office, she became ever more emphatic in declaring that the project of European union threatened British liberties.

The European pot came to a boil at the EC conference in Maastricht (in the Netherlands) in December 1991. Major did not want to risk breaking up the EC or to withdraw Britain from it, but as the leader of the Conservatives in Parliament, he had to be mindful of Thatcherite opposition to any movement toward a federal Europe. After a week of intense negotiations at Maastricht, Major scored a diplomatic victory. He won the right for Britain to opt out of the common currency, which was to come into effect by early 1999; he won the right for Britain to reject the Social Charter of the Maastricht Treaty, whereby the European nations agreed to a level playing field in labor law and in certain social policies deemed too socialist by the Conservatives; and he got the Europeans to drop the word *federal* from the Treaty. "I will never, come hell or high water, let our distinctive British identity be lost in a federal Europe," Major promised. Major's success at Maastricht helped him pull off a minor miracle in the general election of April 1992. With Britain in a serious recession, no one expected the Conservatives to win—yet they did: their fourth straight victory since 1979.

The electoral victory, however, brought Major no respite. The Conservative majority was reduced to only twenty-one seats in the House of Commons, which a series of by-election losses shrank even further, and the Conservative party remained deeply divided over Europe. This division was aggravated when the weakness of the pound sterling forced Major to withdraw Britain from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) in September 1992. Britain had joined in 1989 after Thatcher's advisers had persuaded her that belonging to the ERM, which pegged the exchange value of the British pound to the German *deutsche mark*, would be anti-inflationary. But it proved impossible for the government to support the pound at the required level, and an embarrassing withdrawal became necessary. Ironically, this defeat for Major worked to the benefit of the British economy. Withdrawing from the ERM devalued the pound and so encouraged British exports; employment consequently began a slow rise. But Major's shaky hold on his parliamentary party became even shakier. The small band of Thatcherite MPs frequently withheld their support from Major over the next few years over European issues.

The troubles of the government over Europe, the high level of unemployment, a rising crime rate, and the continued decay of social services all contributed by the mid-1990s to a widespread feeling among the British that

something was seriously wrong with their nation. A series of “sleaze scandals” among Conservative MPs—sexual improprieties, mismanagement of personal and public funds, and bribery—made it seem that Major’s government was part of the problem rather than the solution.

TONY BLAIR AND THE RISE OF NEW LABOUR

The Labour party and its new leader, Tony Blair (1953–), were the beneficiaries of the troubles plaguing John Major’s government, yet the victory of New Labour was also very much the victory of Thatcherism. After its swing leftward in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Labour party had begun a steady march to the right in order to make itself electable in Thatcherist Britain. In the general election of 1987, for example, the Labour party emphasized its more centrist orientation by adopting as its symbol a red rose rather than the traditional (and revolutionary) red flag. Over the next few years, Labour scrapped radical policies such as unilateral nuclear disarmament and renationalization of industry and changed the party constitution to make Labour more attractive to a middle-class electorate. These changes included selection of parliamentary candidates on the principle of one member, one vote, which reduced the long-standing power of the trade unions’ block vote. By the time Tony Blair became Labour leader in 1994, then, the party had already gone far toward recoloring itself as a centrist party.

Tony Blair was a public school- and Oxford-educated barrister who had long before replaced both his father’s Toryism and his youthful Marxism with a more pragmatic social democratic politics tinged with Christian socialist values and a fascination with, perhaps even a fetish for, modernization. Blair had made a name for himself as shadow Home secretary and an energetic party reformer. The youngest leader ever of the Labour party (only forty-one years old in 1994), Blair was a person of remarkable charisma, with a magnetic smile and a strong, even ruthless will. To make Labour electable, he made it clear that the party was no longer a foe of business. One important step in persuading the British public that Labour was now New Labour was the removal of the famous Clause 4 from the Labour party’s constitution. Since 1918, this clause had committed the party to the public ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange. New Labour abandoned this clause in 1995.

By the time of the general election of 1997, with Major’s government bogged down in sleaze and divided over the EU, the Labour party held a lead of more than thirty points in public opinion polls. Blair proved to be a master



Tony Blair arrives at 10 Downing Street after New Labour's landslide victory in 1997.

of politics in the new-style public sphere, with its emphasis on television, sound bites, photo ops, and slick public relations. Relying on Blair's youth, energy, and telegenic personality, Labour won a huge victory, the largest majority by a single party in the House of Commons in the twentieth century—177 seats over all other parties combined—and the Conservatives fell from 323 seats to only 165. Shut out altogether from parliamentary seats from Scotland and Wales, the Tories now stood as an exclusively *English* party. Moreover, the election of four Labour MPs of color—three from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds and one from East Asian—marked a significant step in Britain's move toward a more multicultural society. In addition, 120

women won seats in 1997, most of them from the Labour party. To deal with this new reality, the House of Commons closed its rifle range and opened a child-care center. It also, in 1999, altered its long-standing practice of meeting in the evenings (and often into the early morning hours) and adopted more family friendly hours.

BLAIR'S BRITAIN

The presence of the “Blair Babes” (as the 101 female Labour MPs were unfortunately labeled) seemed to signal that a new era had dawned. So, too, did Blair’s policy toward the EU. Moving rapidly on the issue that divided his Conservative opponents, Blair immediately accepted the Social Charter of the Maastricht Treaty and informed the EU that Britain intended to be a constructive partner. In 1998, as part of the process of bringing Britain into line with Europe, his government accepted the European Convention on Human Rights—a move that gave Britain for the first time something of a bill of rights and that gave the European Court of Human Rights review power over British legal cases. Although he did not commit his government to joining the European common currency, Blair talked about accepting the euro at some never-specified future date. Under New Labour, Britain seemed to be moving in a new direction.

Yet Labourites who were hoping that Blair would use New Labour’s massive parliamentary majority to reverse the Thatcherist revolution were sadly disappointed. When Blair moved into Number 10 Downing Street, one of the first people he invited to luncheon was Margaret Thatcher—a clear sign of where his allegiances lay. Certainly in his approach to government, Blair was even more a Thatcherite than John Major. Whereas Major sought to develop consensus among cabinet ministers for government policies, Blair shared Thatcher’s impatience with and even contempt for cabinet government. He and a small set of unelected advisors made the important decisions without cabinet input.

Blair also made sure that New Labour was friendly to business. He and his able chancellor of the exchequer, Gordon Brown (1951–), emphasized balanced budgets, low inflation, and a strong pound. Blair refused to abolish Mrs. Thatcher’s regulations on the trade unions and rejected proposals from his party’s left wing to raise taxes or to launch a serious attack on unequal income distribution. Continuing Thatcher’s privatization agenda, Blair not only maintained the vastly unpopular privatization of British Rail and some utilities, but he also privatized Britain’s air control system and sought a

public-private partnership to run the London Underground. More generally, *market testing* became a key New Labour mantra. Other New Labour policies revealed a Thatcherist emphasis on individual accountability. University students, for example, were now required to pay a portion of their fees and a massive welfare-to-work plan required most welfare recipients to enter training for work.

Unlike Thatcher, however, Blair genuinely believed that the state had an important role to play in social provision. Thus, the welfare-to-work program radically increased state-funded job training and educational programs. Most importantly, Blair and Brown placed a high priority on restoring the NHS. In his first year in office, Blair introduced a one-time only tax on windfall profits earned by certain individuals on the sale of privatized industries, and directed the consequent revenue toward the NHS. After another big victory in the general election of 2001, the Blair government devoted much more money to recapitalizing the NHS as well as to eradicating pockets of poverty among old age pensioners and single-parent families and establishing a pre-school program for disadvantaged children.

Blair's New Labour government also moved ahead with ambitious constitutional reforms. As we will see in the next chapter, Blair not only carried through devolution in both Wales and Scotland, but he also succeeded in devolving government in Northern Ireland back to a reconstituted Stormont parliament as part of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Peace in Northern Ireland after thirty years of terrorism and bloodshed was surely the most impressive achievement of Blair's political career.

Devolution was not, however, the only constitutional reform undertaken by Blair and New Labour. The second important constitutional change was reform of the House of Lords. As a self-proclaimed modernizer, Blair was determined to abolish or reform, he said, "all forms of conservatism that have so long held them [the British people] back." The House of Lords, long a bastion of conservatism, naturally was a prime target, even though the Lords' legislative authority had been reduced to delaying for only one year legislation passed by the House of Commons. Whatever formula should be adopted for reform of the Lords, Blair intended to end voting by the *hereditary peers*, of whom there were about 750 (there were 450 life peers). Various options for reform were hotly debated after 1997. Blair appointed a commission to study the matter in 1999, and as an interim measure provided that 92 of the hereditary peers (elected by their fellows) would stay on, along with the life peers. There was some emotional opposition by traditional aristocrats, including one overwrought declamation by the earl of

Burford, who leapt upon the woolsack (the traditional and official seat of the Lord Speaker) to accuse the Blair government of treason by abolishing eight hundred years of tradition: “Before us,” he declared, “lies the wasteland: no queen, no sovereignty, no freedom.” But the interim measure passed into law, and some 660 hereditary peers left their chamber at Westminster for the last time.

Throughout his years in office, Blair benefitted greatly from the growing prosperity of the financial and service sectors of the British economy, which turned for the better in the late 1990s. Compared to France and Germany, the British did very well in the ten years of Blair’s government. The gross domestic product (GDP) grew while inflation and unemployment remained low. Still, although material standards of living in Britain generally remained high, inequality continued to grow under New Labour, if only slightly, for it was the rich who benefitted most from economic conditions. The share of the national income enjoyed by the richest 1 percent of the population grew from 5.6 to 6.3 percent between 1995 and 2005.

Blair’s government enjoyed remarkable success and popularity for the better part of three years, his approval ratings reaching the highest levels of any British prime minister since such polls began. A decade later, however, Blair was in a very different position. In the general election of 2005 the huge Labour majorities of 1997 and 2001 were cut to only 66 seats (on only 35.3% of the popular vote). As was the case with Thatcher in 1990, much of the opposition to Blair came from within his own party; like Thatcher, he was forced out of office before he was ready to go.

Throughout Blair’s long term in office, there had always been underlying discontent among certain sectors of the British population. Many country people, for example, felt that Blair’s urbane New Labour movement was ignorant of rural life and agricultural problems. They rallied in surprising strength, on horseback and in tweeds, against efforts by the Labour and Liberal parties to end fox hunting. Old Labourites—trade unionists and moderate socialists who had long formed the core of the party—believed that Blair and New Labour had betrayed the enduring principles of the social-democratic left by accepting Thatcher’s idea of an entrepreneurial culture, along with huge salaries for corporate executives and a widening gap between rich and poor. More broadly, many Britons thought that Blair was too devoted to politics by spin doctors, public relations experts, and focus groups, and not enough to genuine principles.

Yet it was foreign rather than domestic policy that proved Blair’s downfall. Just as Blair repudiated the stance of Old Labour on domestic issues, so

he rejected traditional Labour tendencies toward pacifism and internationalism. He took a humanitarian and moralistic approach to foreign policy and believed that Britain as a highly moral nation should play a key role in world affairs. Blair was, then, every bit as willing for Britain to follow interventionist policies as Thatcher had been. In 1999, for example, he was a strong advocate of military action in Kosovo, even if ground forces were needed, to stop the oppression of ethnic Albanians by genocidal Serbian nationalists. Moreover, like Thatcher, Blair believed that a British prime minister must make alliance with the United States and friendship with the American president top priorities in foreign policy. Though committed to a leadership role for Britain in the European community, Blair thought that Britain was well placed to serve as a bridge between Europe and the United States.

These factors explain why, in 2003, Blair broke with Britain's allies in Europe and backed the American invasion and occupation of Iraq—a decision that eventually ended his political career. Blair (like the vast majority of the British public) was horrified by “9 11,” the terrorist attack carried out by the Muslim extremist organization al-Qaeda on New York and Washington, DC, on September 11, 2001. He immediately pledged support to the United States in its “war on terror”: one month later, British troops joined in the American invasion of Afghanistan, where al-Qaeda was rooted.

A majority of Britons backed that action, but the situation was far different in 2003 with the invasion of Iraq. Iraq had played no role in the 9 11 attacks but American policy makers linked the war against Saddam Hussein's Iraqi dictatorship to the wider war on terror by asserting that Hussein possessed, and would very likely use, “weapons of mass destruction”—biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons. Tossing aside his usual reliance on opinion polls and focus groups, Blair ignored public disapproval and committed some forty-one thousand soldiers—about one-third of the total invasion force—to the attack against Saddam Hussein. The British forces performed very well but opposition swelled at home. In February 2003 an antiwar demonstration in London had gathered a million people—the largest demonstration ever in British history. To opponents of the war, Blair seemed to be trailing along uncritically after the American president, who was deeply unpopular in Britain. He had become, critics said, “[President George W.] Bush's poodle.” When the invading forces found no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, public opinion in Britain turned even more sharply against Blair and British involvement in the war. Dissent within his own party forced Blair to declare that the general election of 2005 would be his

last, and finally to resign as prime minister and leader of the Labour party in June 2007—earlier than he had wanted.

THE COLLAPSE OF 2008: ECONOMIC CRISIS AND POLITICAL CONFUSION

The man who succeeded Blair as Labour leader and as prime minister was Gordon Brown. The longest serving chancellor of the exchequer in modern British history, Brown had stood impatiently in the wings waiting for Blair to retire. Far less charismatic than Blair, Brown was a famously dour Scot whose smile often seemed more of a grimace. He promised a return to genuine cabinet government, but many colleagues regarded Brown as something of a bully. A “son of the manse” (his father was a Church of Scotland minister), Brown was chosen as a young boy for an experimental fast-track educational program in the state school which launched him into the University of Edinburgh at age sixteen. He eventually received a PhD in history, but he made his political career as an astute economic policy maker. Much of the economic success of Blair’s governments rested on Brown’s substantial shoulders. In a speech given in London just before he took over, Brown reveled in that success and proclaimed to his listeners that they were living in “an era that history will record as the beginning of a new Golden Age.”

The Golden Age proved short-lived. Just three months after Brown became prime minister, the Northern Rock Bank had to seek support from the Bank of England to cover its obligations; the action triggered a run on the bank, the first in Britain in 150 years. These dramatic events proved to be just one small episode in a global economic breakdown, the worst since the Great Depression. Across the United States and much of Europe, risky lending policies had inflated home prices. When the housing bubbles burst, the human tragedies piled up: people lost homes, savings, and jobs.

The interlocking nature of the global financial system ensured that the crisis spread rapidly. Thus, in September 2008, when the American financial firm Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy—the largest such filing in global history—the impact in London was immediate: the overnight interbank lending rate (the interest charged on very short-term loans between banks) doubled. As the British financial system wavered on the brink of collapse, Brown was forced to announce a £500 billion (\$850 billion) bailout of British banks. Over the next few months, the United States and many European governments followed Brown’s lead in an effort to stabilize their shattered economies as a full-scale recession traumatized much of the Western world.

In Britain, more than a million people lost their jobs. With much of the finger-pointing directed at the buying and selling of mortgages that almost seemed designed for default, people began to wonder if the financial miracle of the Blair-Brown years had been nothing more than a cheap magic trick.

The strangely named financial crisis of 2007–2008 (strange in that it in no way ended in 2008) called into question many of the supposed certainties of post-Thatcherist Britain. Nationalization, for so long a discredited notion, was back on the table as governments throughout the western world scrambled to save banks and other financial institutions. So, too, with Keynesian economics. Brown moved quickly to jump-start the stalling British economy by classic Keynesian techniques: tax cuts, government investment and loan guarantees, and even a car scrapper program that subsidized the purchase of new cars. Some economists, moreover, argued that the crisis stemmed from Thatcherist deregulation of the financial system. They pointed out that Thatcher's "Big Bang" of 1986, for so long celebrated as freeing London's stock market and banking world for remarkable prosperity, had also freed financiers to make decisions that sacrificed long-term national prosperity for short-term personal gain.

Yet Thatcherism survived the crisis. In the years after 2008, ballooning government borrowing led to a debt crisis within the EU, as the financial instability of states such as Portugal, Italy, Greece, Spain, and Ireland threatened the value of the common European currency, the euro. Because Britain had not adopted the euro, it was relatively shielded from the debt crisis; nevertheless, the British national debt also reached alarming levels. Brown had won praise both in Britain and around the world for his initial response to the crisis. His stolid demeanor, for so long a political liability, played well in a time of economic emergency, and few could fault his economic wherewithal. Most economists agreed that Brown's fiscal stimulus program saved Britain's economy from collapse. But as the focus of concern shifted from the housing crash and unemployment to national debt, political leaders and economists debated whether to proceed with Keynesian-based stimulus programs or to adopt stringent austerity policies aimed at cutting spending and whittling down debt levels.

The British general election of 2010 reflected this wider context of political and economic confusion. Brown, who led the Labour party into the election, found himself on the defensive. The year 2010 also saw Britain's first ever televised debate among party leaders—and, sadly for him, Gordon Brown simply was not a telegenic personality. The most striking feature

of the debate, however, was that Brown faced off against not only David Cameron (1966–), the Conservative party leader, but also Nick Clegg (1967–), leader of the Liberal Democrats (the successor party to the old SDP-Liberal Alliance). Just as in the early 1980s, Britain's two-party system seemed to be cracking under the enormous strain of economic crisis and, just as in the early 1980s, a third party seemed genuinely electable.

The election results showed a political system in the midst of upheaval. To no one's surprise, Labour lost control of the House of Commons for the first time in thirteen years—but the Conservatives did not hold an outright majority. Only 36 percent of the popular vote went to the Conservatives, compared to 29 percent for Labour; most extraordinary of all, 35 percent of those who voted did not cast their ballots for either of the two main parties, the highest such percentage since 1918. Most of this group voted for the "Lib Dems," whose sixty-two parliamentary seats left them holding the balance of power. The result was a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, with Cameron as prime minister (at age forty-one, the youngest prime minister since 1812) and Clegg in the not very well-defined role of deputy prime minister.

The son of a stockbroker, grandson of a baronet, and descendant of William IV (by his mistress), Cameron seemed a party leader from the pre-Thatcher era: he had followed the traditional upper-class trajectory from prep school through Eton and Oxford straight into a political career. But Thatcherite worries that Cameron might betray Thatcher's legacy were unfounded. Despite his less-than-enthusiastic endorsement by the electorate, Cameron moved quickly to jettison Brown's Keynesian policies. He instituted a five-year austerity plan that closed many programs, cut many services, capped welfare benefits, and reduced the public sector to a size not seen in the post-World War II period. University tuition fees tripled, and in 2011, Cameron's government embarked on an extensive restructuring of the National Health Service that greatly expanded the role of private health care providers.

Economic crisis thus provided Cameron with the means to further the Thatcherist program of contracting the welfare state. And, as in Thatcher's time, social disorder escalated. In August of 2011, the poorer areas of London, Liverpool, Birmingham, Bristol, and Manchester erupted with riots. Cameron blamed the rioting on the "slow-motion moral collapse" of British society and, like Thatcher, insisted that the state had an important role to play in strengthening traditional values and imposing law and order.

“BRITISHNESS” IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The European debt crisis intensified the debate over British membership in the EU and widened the ranks of the Eurosceptics. Cameron, who declared notions of a developing European identity or of loyalty to a European flag to be nonsense, pledged to hold an “in or out” referendum on British membership in the EU by 2018. Such a pledge, of course, was fairly meaningless as it depended on future general election results, but it revealed the strength of Euroscepticism within the Conservative party and the wider electorate.

The intensification of the debate over Britain’s place in the EU was, however, more than a response to the faltering euro. Questions about Britain’s European identity arose from a wider struggle to define *Britishness* in the post-Thatcher era. As chapter 32 will detail, in the twenty-first century resurgent Welsh and particularly Scottish nationalism challenged the future of Britain itself. But at the same time, “British” became increasingly important as a national category and personal identity for many Britons of color. For growing numbers of British citizens, the category of British offered a viable national identity in ways that English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish, with their ethnic inflections, did not.

We have seen that, since the late 1940s, the immigration of significant numbers of Afro-Caribbeans, southeast Asians, and Africans changed the complexion of British society and complicated the definition of British identity. By 2001, ethnic minorities accounted for slightly more than 7 percent of the British population. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh constituted the place of origin of 47 percent of ethnic minority Britons and the Caribbean 13 percent, with the remainder coming from all over the world. Of these four million people, 50 percent had been born in Britain. Of those under age fifteen, 90 percent were Britain-born.

Although born in Britain, many of these Britons found themselves referred to in the media, by politicians, and by their fellow citizens as immigrants. Journalists even used the nonsensical term third-generation immigrants to describe British men and women of color, thus betraying an uneasiness with the concept of British as anything but white. Racial hostilities tended to be most pronounced in cities with high internal segregation, such as Rochdale, a once thriving textile center in northern England where inhabitants of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent made up only 20 percent of the city’s population, but constituted the vast majority of those living in five inner city wards.

Yet Britain was in many ways one of the most successful multicultural societies in Europe. Rochdale was the exception rather than the rule.



In 2002, British citizens welcome home their queen.

Racially mixed families were a common sight throughout urban Britain, with the level of black-Caribbean and white marriage in 2001 eight times higher than the level of black and white marriage in the United States. Moreover, many within the ethnic minority community were securely located in the middle class: Britons of Indian and Chinese descent outpaced white Britons in education, and West Indian women on average earned more and possessed higher educational qualifications than did their white counterparts. Parliament itself was slowly beginning to reflect a changing Britain: after the general election of 2010, twenty-seven MPs from minority communities sat in the House of Commons—quite an increase from the four in 1997.

The success of multicultural Britain was, however, often overshadowed in popular perception and in political rhetoric by a growing Islamist threat. By the early twenty-first century, there were between 1.5 and 2 million Muslims in Britain, most of them of South Asian descent—from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. South Asian men had migrated to Britain to work in Midlands factories after World War II, but as British industry declined in the 1980s and 1990s, they lost factory jobs and often were reduced to relatively low-paid shop keeping and service work, or unemployment. For some young British Muslims in these communities, particularly young men, the economic hopes that had driven their parents or grandparents to migrate now

seemed futile. At the same time, the strong ties to the home country that gave their parents or grandparents a sense of identity and community did not bind them as tightly. Disaffected, angry, and alienated, they broke with their parents' version of Islam and turned to Islamist movements such as Wahhabism (from Saudi Arabia), the Deobandi (from India), and Jamaat-i-Islami (from Pakistan). These movements called for a return to what their adherents defined as purer forms of Islam; they also defined western culture as inherently immoral. Although surveys such as one done by the *Guardian* newspaper in 2012 found that most British Muslims were proud to be British and felt a strong sense of belonging to Britain, this minority of Islamists regarded British and Muslim as antithetical identities.

British participation in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11 solidified the Islamist belief that Britain, as part of the corrupt West, and "pure" Islam were combatants in a global political and spiritual battle. In waging this battle, Islamists turned to terrorism. British intelligence foiled several terrorist attempts but on "7/7"—July 7, 2005—four British Islamists killed fifty-two people and injured seven hundred by bombing three tube stations and a bus in London. In the wake of 7/7, British Muslims—and British Sikhs and Hindus, who were often mistakenly assumed to be Muslim—frequently found themselves the object of suspicion and the target of hostility.

Popular fear and anger also focused on refugees. Political turmoil and economic stagnation had throughout the modern era driven people from impoverished and war-ravaged regions to seek asylum in wealthier, more stable states. In the twenty-first century, Britain ranked fifth, behind the United States, Germany, France, and Sweden, in the numbers of refugees looking for sanctuary within its borders. With no right to work until their legal status was settled—a process that often took years—refugees had no choice but to rely on the welfare state to survive. As popular anxiety over Islamist terrorism and economic crisis grew, refugees became easy targets. The actual numbers were very small—only 0.33 percent of the population—but in the portrait painted by the popular press, Britain was awash with "bogus asylum seekers" who threatened to undermine the British political system and overtax its economy.

BRITISH SOCIETY AND CULTURE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The escalation of ethnic tensions should not, however, obscure the vitality of British culture at the turn of the century and beyond. In 1996, the American ice cream company Ben & Jerry's featured a new flavor called

“Cool Britannia.” Quickly taken up by the media, Cool Britannia became the half-satirical, half-serious label for British cultural resurgence during the Blair era. Tony Blair’s drive for modernization, as well as his own elegant personal style, typified at least the fashionable part of Britain’s new appearance as prosperous and cool. Blair had declared that “the new Britain is a meritocracy where we break down barriers of class, religion, race, and culture.” Britain no longer seemed a quaint country of picturesque villages, reserved but polite people in sensible tweeds, and an ancient aristocracy deferred to by a working class that was conscious of its proper place. The economic prosperity of the Blair era, and particularly the renaissance of London, provided the fuel for cultural experimentation. London, now the home of more foreign business people than any other city in Europe, had become a truly cosmopolitan city, with vast new developments along the Thames changing its physical fabric as well.

Inspired in part by the Swinging London of the 1960s, artists, musicians, designers, and even chefs both looked back to that decade, yet also embraced the idea of a new century. The visual arts, in particular, underwent a strong revival. In the early 1990s, the recession of the Major years had resulted in the closure of many galleries and a contraction of opportunities for new artists to show their work. In response, a group of young artists began to use warehouses as exhibition spaces. Acting as their own curators, then, and embracing the entrepreneurial, profit-oriented, self-help ethic of Thatcherism, these YBAs (Young British Artists) exploded onto the British art scene. Their works recalled many of the themes of Pop Art from the 1960s—the playful yet serious use of popular and consumer culture, the challenge to the idea of art as rarefied or set apart from ordinary life, and the idea of the artist as a performer—but pushed these themes to new limits. Damien Hirst’s *Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), for example, featured a shark suspended in formaldehyde, whereas his *A Thousand Years* (1990) comprised a rotting cow’s head, complete with flies and maggots. It was, however, Tracey Emin’s *My Bed* (1998) that came to represent “Britart.” *My Bed* was exactly that, Emin’s bed. Its stained and rumpled sheets, used condoms, slippers, empty bottles, and cigarette butts confronted the viewer with the mess of everyday existence and an uncomfortably intimate glimpse into the artist’s life.

Although Britart, with its emphasis on banality and corruption, often offered a disturbing vision of contemporary life, the revitalization of the British art world and its international renown helped reignite a pride in or at least a sense of Britishness that had often been lacking from the



Tracey Emin, My Bed (1998). One of the most well-known Britart works, My Bed epitomized the Young British Artists' use of ordinary objects and shock tactics.

conflict-filled 1970s and 1980s. This theme is even more clear in the later work of David Hockney. As we saw in chapter 28, Hockney first emerged as part of the Pop Art movement of the late 1950s and 1960s and, like many British artists, musicians, writers, and academics in that era, gravitated toward the United States. In the late 1990s, however, Hockney returned to Britain, both physically and artistically. In a series of stunning works ranging from iPad drawings to enormous multi-paneled paintings completed over the next several years, he offered an homage to the quintessentially British landscape of the Yorkshire Wolds. These works rest securely in the long tradition of British landscape painting and reflect the love of the countryside that remains a strong feature of British national identity.

A return to Britishness also marked popular music. Although American songs and musicians continued to dominate much of the genre, the 1990s witnessed the emergence of “Britpop,” a conscious effort by alternative British musicians to return to the lyricism and clean guitar sound of British music of the 1960s. Groups such as Blur and Oasis soon found commercial success with songs that, like the works of Britart, often critiqued the banality of day-to-day British suburban life. At the same time, Britpop reflected

the multicultural definition of Britishness by the late twentieth century, with rhythms influenced by the ska revivalist bands of the 1980s. Multicultural, multicolored Britishness also appeared in a second development in popular music in this era: rave culture. Raves or enormous illegal dance parties energized by the amphetamine Ecstasy, centered on the sound system, the group of engineers and DJs (disc jockeys) who produced and played the electronic dance music. First developed in Jamaica in the 1950s, the sound system entered Britain through the Afro-Caribbean immigrant community.

The reassertion of Britishness in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century also contained a deeply nostalgic quality. History programs became surprisingly popular on both the BBC and Britain's commercial television stations, with most of these programs focusing on the bygone days of British glory. Similarly, these decades saw steady increases in the numbers of visitors to Britain's enormous stock of country houses, most now abandoned by their aristocratic and gentry families into the hands of the National Trust.

Perhaps the most intriguing instances of nostalgia, however, surfaced in popular culture. In 1997, Joanne Rowling (1965–) published the first in her series of seven novels detailing the maturation of a young British wizard. The *Harry Potter* series became a publishing and then a cultural phenomenon, selling 400 million (and counting) copies worldwide and spawning eight films and more than \$15 billion worth of related merchandise. Both the books and films featured a multiethnic cast—and significantly, Rowling insisted on British actors and British locations for the movies. They are set in a recognizably contemporary Britain; nevertheless, they also evoke a now largely lost world of village life and recognizable hierarchies, and of course, they feature a very British boy saving the world. The long-running James Bond film series and the BBC's revival of the *Doctor Who* television series also depicted fictional universes in which Britain still dominated global affairs. On large and small screens all over the world, viewers watched the very British Bond and the very British Doctor again and again saving the world.

The changing image of the royal family also contributed to the revitalization of Britishness. Of course, the British monarchy had lost its real political power long before the twentieth century; by the 1990s, its functions were essentially symbolic, philanthropic, and moral—that is, to serve as the prime exemplar of propriety and Britishness. In the early 1990s, however, sexual escapades and messy divorces among Queen Elizabeth's offspring and

their spouses filled the pages of London's sensationalist tabloids. Plainly, too many "royals" had come to think of themselves as nothing more than celebrities and to behave accordingly. The worst scandals of all stemmed from the unraveling marriage of Elizabeth's heir, Prince Charles (1948–), and his wife, Princess Diana (1961–1997), whose squabbles went so far that each began to use leaks to the press against the other. (The two divorced in 1996.) A considerable number of the British public became embarrassed by what some called the "royal layabouts," and many questioned whether the large sums spent from the public purse on the monarchy were worth it.

The fortunes of the royal family reached a nadir in 1997 when Princess Diana died in an auto accident. Millions of British people engaged in a vast public outpouring of grief, not the expression of mourning and appreciation for a great public figure like Queen Victoria or Winston Churchill, but an emotional tribute to a fairy-tale figure, an international celebrity with whom participants in mass culture could identify. Fairy tales need villains, and in the public narrative surrounding Diana's death, the royal family filled that role.

In the following years, however, "the Firm," as the royals called themselves, staged an astounding comeback. Astute public relations, as well as the charm and telegenic qualities of Charles and Diana's eldest son, Prince William, helped reposition the royals as national symbols. As result, although in 1992, the public had balked at paying for repairs when part of Windsor Castle was destroyed by fire, twenty years later complaints about the costs of Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee were muted.

Although the royal family seemed destined to remain in place for at least the next few decades, the British class system, for so long a dominant feature of British social life and personal identity, was evolving. The traditional categories of upper, middle, and working class fit only 39 percent of the population by 2013. In that year, the BBC completed the largest study of class identity ever done in Britain. The survey found that the lines that had once separated the middle and working classes had become extremely fuzzy, with employment in technical and service work particularly blurring class identity. Extremes of wealth and poverty, however, remained pronounced: approximately 15 percent of the population belonged to what the BBC termed the "precarariat" or precarious proletariat, a group lacking not only in economic but also in social and cultural capital, essentially cut off from the ideas, values, and opportunities that shaped the lives of the majority of Britons.

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Chapter 32

The Question of Britain: The Celtic Countries, 1945–2014

In the final decades of the twentieth century, it became clear that Britain was a multinational state. Although the English tended to see little distinction between “English” and “British,” in the Celtic countries, the dual identity developed in the nineteenth century experienced cross-cutting influences. Northern Ireland, as we will see, was a special case, but in the 1950s and 1960s, economic prosperity and the welfare state seemed to be drawing Wales and Scotland more closely into the English/British core. But from the later 1960s on, as economic troubles mounted, the Empire shrank and the postwar political consensus crumbled, Celtic national identities reasserted themselves. By the twenty-first century, the unity of Britain itself was in jeopardy.

WALES, 1945–1997

It is important to remember that Wales had been fully integrated with England since the 1500s. Unlike the Scots, the Welsh retained no legal system, schools, or church of their own on which they could focus their sense of Welsh identity. Welsh national identity thus was a matter of language, culture, and religious Nonconformity. Industrialization had drawn a dense concentration of Welsh speakers to South Wales and thereby for a time had strengthened the hold of the language. By the twentieth century, however, migration of English and Scottish people into South Wales and the strong ties of Welsh industry to the British economy combined to reduce the proportion of Welsh speakers in the population and thus weaken the sense of distinctive Welsh identity. By 1931, only 31 percent of the Welsh spoke Welsh. In the depression decades after 1918, class identity was more important than Welsh identity in Wales.

The Labour party, as we have seen, dominated Welsh politics after 1918. As the party of the whole *British* working class, however, Labour was ambivalent about Welsh nationalism. Moreover, after World War II, the Labour party was a powerful *centralizing* force everywhere in Britain because it believed in democratic central planning. Labourites, including many Welsh Labour MPs, saw real social progress achieved by the British welfare state and so tended to be skeptical about the potential benefits of national self-government in Wales.

Both Labourites and Conservatives alike insisted that Wales needed economic restructuring far more than any political autonomy. Wales had become almost totally dependent on the iron and coal industries, both of which had declined since World War I. The South Wales coal mines were old, deep, and inefficient, and the iron and steel mills suffered from backward technology and embittered industrial relations. The solution was to diversify; therefore, the post-World War II Labour government and its Conservative successors deliberately contracted the coal mining industry and sponsored the development of new industries in Wales—clothing, toys, bicycles, vacuum cleaners, synthetic fabrics, oil refineries, and potato chips—in addition to investing in giant new steel mills. By 1979, there were only 30,000 coal miners in Wales, compared to 136,000 in 1938.

The restructuring of the Welsh economy, however, was only partly successful. Although Wales benefited from the general economic expansion of the 1950s and 1960s, Wales remained a “special area”—a relatively depressed region. Rural Wales continued to lose population as Welsh farming became mechanized. Tourism in the scenic areas proved insufficient to hold young people who earlier would have gone into farming or rural crafts. The closure of coal pits, the failure of the new steel works to compete in world markets, and the rural depopulation all contributed to a Welsh unemployment rate higher than that in Britain as a whole. By the 1970s, Wales was a classic case of industrial decline.

In 1974, coal became crucial to Britain again. The Arab-Israeli war of 1973 provoked an Arab embargo on oil exports to the West. Oil prices jumped 300 percent in early 1974, and the demand for coal soared. British coal miners, including those of Wales, seized the opportunity to claim wage increases. The result, however, was not a recovery of the coal industry in Wales or anywhere else in Britain, but (as we saw in chapter 30) a protracted strike, bitter confrontation between the government and the coal miners, and polarization in British politics. The Welsh coal industry continued to

contract so that, in the latter 1970s, the unemployment rate in South Wales climbed toward double digits.

Meanwhile, the traditional popular culture of Wales was also changing. Rural small-town Wales was disappearing. Although Wales in general held to its religious roots more firmly than did England, the Nonconformist chapel and Sabbatarianism (the idea that Sundays should be devoted to God and not recreation or work) were fading before the new consumerist and permissive culture. Some Welsh towns now voted to keep cinemas open on Sundays, and industrial South Wales even elected to allow pubs to do business on Sundays. The Welsh language continued to decline: 28 percent of the people spoke Welsh in 1951, but only 20 percent in 1971. Especially disturbing to Welsh nationalists was the fact that only a small number of Welsh children were learning Welsh, even though Welsh was taught as an elective in all primary schools and some high schools.

Concern about economic troubles, cultural decay, and the decline of Welsh speaking caused a revival of Welsh political nationalism in the 1960s. In 1945, *Plaid Cymru* (the Welsh Nationalist Party) had been hardly more than a fringe party, with strength only among academics and in the rural Welsh-speaking areas. It managed to get 250,000 signatures on a petition for a Welsh Parliament in 1956, but the party's membership in 1959 was still only about 75,000. In the 1960s, however, concern about the language attracted more members. The leading advocate of Welsh nationalism, J. Saunders Lewis, came out of retirement in 1962 to lead a crusade to save Welsh. Inspired by radical political movements throughout the world in the 1960s, young militants in the Welsh language movement adopted the tactics of mass demonstrations and sit-ins. A few extremists turned to terrorism and set off bombs in public buildings. By the late 1960s, *Plaid Cymru* presented a real threat to Labour's political domination in Wales. The nationalist party won its first parliamentary seat in 1966 and in the early 1970s took ten more seats.

As *Plaid Cymru*'s appeal spread even to the Welsh working class, who increasingly voted nationalist in protest against their economic plight, the Labour party naturally tried to pacify nationalist sentiment. The Wilson government set up the Welsh Office, headed by a secretary of state in 1964, the same year that BBC Wales began broadcasting. In 1965 a government committee, chaired by a Welshman, Sir David Hughes Parry, declared that the decline of the Welsh language threatened Welsh culture and identity. The Hughes Parry Report recommended that the Welsh language be granted



In 1969, the investiture ceremony of Queen Elizabeth's heir, Charles, as the Prince of Wales was held at Caernarvon Castle in Wales, in a deliberate attempt to appeal to Welsh voters and viewers.

equal legal status with English throughout Wales and, in 1967, the Welsh Language Act took the first steps toward ensuring that status by establishing the right to testify in courts in Welsh. In 1969, the investiture of Queen Elizabeth's eldest son Charles as prince of Wales in Caernarvon Castle was designed to appeal to a Welsh audience, with Charles speaking in both Welsh and English.

Such measures were not enough. As unemployment in the South Wales coalfield increased to 10 percent and Welsh nationalism continued to rise, some Welsh nationalists began to dream of an independent Wales that would prosper on oil refining revenues while the rest of Britain sank into poverty. By the late 1960s, then, Harold Wilson's Labour government was forced to consider the very controversial issue of establishing some form of Welsh provincial government. *Devolution*—the idea of delegating some degree of autonomy—in this case, on Wales and Scotland, came to the forefront of British politics. Always reluctant to support regional autonomy, Wilson's government favored an elected Welsh regional council with only modest executive and no legislative authority.

Devolution proved an explosive political issue. Labour's limited plan did not satisfy Welsh nationalists, but it roused all the old unionist passions of British patriots. The question of devolution split the Labour party; in con-

trast, Conservative opposition to devolution was solid. In the general election of February 1974, Labour was returned to office with a minority government under Wilson, and for the first time since 1945, failed to win 50 percent of the Welsh vote. Wilson had to find a way to paper over the division within his party while doing something to placate Welsh (and, as we will see, Scottish) nationalism. His solution was to introduce a devolution bill for both Wales and Scotland, but on condition that, if it passed, referenda in both Wales and Scotland would be held *before* the bill was formally enacted. Moreover, in each referendum, at least 40 percent of the *total eligible* electorate (not only those actually voting) would have to vote yes for the bill to go into effect.

As preparations for the referenda proceeded, the general issue of Welsh and Scottish autonomy roused great emotion. In England and in Wales, some British patriots believed that Great Britain might be breaking up, whereas many Welsh nationalists believed that devolution did not go far enough. Moreover, a popular referendum on a parliamentary decision was a constitutional innovation, which to some observers seemed to strike a blow at the cherished tradition of parliamentary sovereignty. In Wales itself, opponents of Welsh nationalism increasingly dominated the debate. Many nationalists were lukewarm toward the bill, and English-speaking Welsh men and women feared that any Welsh assembly might fall under the sway of a romantic, backward-looking, Welsh-speaking minority.

In the end, when the referendum was held in 1979, only 11.8 percent of the eligible voters, and only 20 percent of those voting, cast ballots in favor of devolution. For the time being, then, devolution was dead in Wales, killed by concern among the vast majority of the population about the potentially disastrous economic and social effects of separation from Britain.

Welsh nationalism, however, did not die out and Wales suffered from economic and social disaster anyway. The contraction of coal mining and steel manufacturing under Thatcher and Major hit Wales particularly hard, with many communities ravaged by unemployment and depopulation. In the harsh period between 1979 and 1981, male employment in South Wales dropped by 30 percent and female employment by 40 percent. By 1986, the male unemployment rate stood at 15.9 percent and only 37 percent of Welsh heads of households were in full employment. Graffiti on the Severn Bridge declared, “Wales is closed.”

The miners’ strike of 1985 became a pivotal moment in Welsh culture, even though by that time less than 4 percent of the Welsh labor force was employed in the coal industry. The collieries had a symbolic place in Welsh

identity, however, and the strike of 1985 represented not only the last gasp of trade union power, but also the fading away of the postwar belief that together unions and social democratic political leaders could create a society characterized by full employment and equal opportunity for all. Miners in south Wales were solid in their support of the strike; only fifteen hundred of twenty thousand southern Welsh miners crossed the picket lines and returned to work during the strike, even though striking meant catastrophic debt levels, denial of social security benefits, and in many cases, tapped phone lines. Women threw themselves into the strike in unprecedented numbers. Although many miners appreciated the women's activism, others recoiled from this challenge to traditional gender roles. Across Wales, public sympathy for the miners was strong; for many people, supporting the strike was a way of protesting against Thatcherism. The protest was, of course, unavailing. The defeat of the strike signaled the rapid dismantling of most of what remained of Welsh coal mining. In 1995, when Major's government privatized the coal industry, there were just two pits left in south Wales.

Somewhat surprisingly, the Labour party did not flourish in this climate of economic despair and social distress. Most Welsh voters recognized that the contraction of the coal industry had been underway long before Thatcher, and in many communities Labour's long monopoly on local government had translated into corruption and cronyism. Despite widespread discontent with Thatcher, in the general election of 1983, Labour won just 37.5 percent of the Welsh vote. The party did better in 1987 after the turmoil of the miners' strike, with 45 percent of the Welsh voting Labour.

After the failure of devolution in 1979, Plaid Cymru redefined itself as a left-of-center party, devoted to asserting Welsh independence in the face of Thatcher's aggressive Englishness, but its share of the Welsh vote remained minuscule. Welsh nationalism did not disappear, however. Welsh literature and language continued to serve as an important channel of nationalist expression, as did BBC Wales and a myriad of committees and councils set up by Conservative governments to administer Welsh economic, social, and cultural affairs. But perhaps one of the most important outlets for the expression of Welsh national identity was rugby. Although football (soccer) conquered the rest of the Britain, rugby continued to reign supreme in Wales. At the matches, supporters would belt out the Welsh national anthem "Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau" (Land of My Fathers) and routinely boo playing of "God Save the Queen."

SCOTLAND, 1945–1997

In Scotland, as in Wales, a key theme in postwar history was the decline of heavy industry. Likewise, in Scottish politics, Labour's position eroded in the face of a revived nationalism. Scotland differed from Wales, however, in two key ways. First, North Sea oil made a much bigger impact north of the Tweed, and second, the Scottish National Party (SNP) was more successful than Plaid Cymru. As a result of these and other factors, the Scottish vote on the devolution issue in 1979 differed sharply from that in Wales, though with much the same general outcome.

The central elements of the Scottish economy had long been agriculture, textile manufacturing, and heavy industries such as iron and steel, shipbuilding, and coal mining. As in Wales, the staple industries declined



Two foremen shipwrights inspect the hull of a ship under construction in a Glasgow shipbuilding yard in 1955. By the mid-1980s, the shipbuilding industry had largely disappeared from Scotland.

rapidly in the 1920s and 1930s, and a steady stream of Scottish men and women migrated southward. During World War II, Scottish industry benefited from armaments and shipbuilding contracts, but many factories in other lines of work simply closed down. Thousands of young Scottish women, especially those from the Highlands, were conscripted to work in munitions plants in the English Midlands. Although unemployment in Scotland disappeared during the war, Scotland became more dependent than ever on a few heavy industries.

As in Wales, the Labour party in 1945 had a firm grip on Scotland. Labour regularly won a majority of Scotland's parliamentary seats, with the Conservatives winning most of the rest and the Liberals a few. Yet as a centralizing party, Labour gave no more attention to Scottish problems than it did to Welsh problems. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Parliament spent little time on Scottish issues and Labour was not seen by the Scots as speaking for Scotland.

Ironically, the Labour governments of Clement Attlee and Harold Wilson invested more funds per capita in Scotland than in any other region of Britain. Nevertheless, as demand for British heavy industrial products shrank, the Scottish economy suffered severely. Scottish shipyards lost out in the worldwide competition to build the new style gigantic container ships and oil tankers that shippers demanded after World War II. Overly cautious management, obsolete design and marketing, and "bloody-minded" industrial relations dulled the competitive edge of the Clydeside shipbuilding firms. Scottish coal mining, like that of the Welsh, was hampered by the age and depth of the mines and the declining demand for coal in an age of cheap oil. By the end of the 1950s, the growth rate of the Scottish economy was only half that of the rest of Britain. In the 1960s, Wilson's government did invest heavily in the Scottish economy and promoted mergers of smaller companies into huge ones. Yet Scottish economic growth lagged and unemployment rose compared to Britain as a whole. Furthermore, the decline and amalgamation of heavy industry was accompanied by loss of control by Scots of their economy: by the late 1970s, only 41 percent of Scottish manufacturing was owned by Scots.

Then North Sea oil began to flow. Oil provided a major growth industry for Scotland. Because almost all of the British-owned North Sea reserves were in fact off the northeastern coast of Scotland, the oil companies (most of them American) located their main shore operations in northeast Scotland. The huge production platforms, for example, were built there, and the

oil was piped ashore for storage and refining there. Aberdeen became a boom town, and the Scottish northeast took on, as Professor Christopher Harvie has written, a Yukon-like atmosphere.

The oil bonanza only heightened nationalist tensions. Scots were quick to notice that it was Scotland that suffered most of the environmental damage resulting from the oil boom. Moreover, the Scottish economy needed a long-term and well-planned infusion of capital, as well as maximum return from the high-tech operations associated with commercial oil production. The British government, however, needed quick cash returns from the oil in order to take care of the balance of payments deficit. Thus, it neglected both to control the rate at which the oil was pumped up from the seafloor and to assure that Scotland received the exploration and production contracts. Most of the exploration rigs and supply ships, for example, were built abroad. Most grievously, from the Scottish point of view, the British government regarded the oil as British, not Scottish, and therefore did not turn the oil tax revenues over to Scotland. These policy issues all contributed to the revival of Scottish nationalism: "It's Scotland's Oil" became the slogan of the SNP.

Scottish nationalism became increasingly politicized from the mid-1960s on. Unlike Welsh nationalists, who sought a nationalist political movement in order to stop the erosion of the Welsh language and culture, Scottish nationalists could draw on a secure sense of national identity. Separate institutions, protected by the Treaty of Union in 1707, had long supported a distinct Scottish culture. Scotland had its own judiciary, laws, administrative system, and established church. The Church of Scotland (or *kirk*), though suffering some decline in membership, had held up better than the Church of England and was a strong focus for national sentiment. Furthermore, a Scottish Office had existed since 1885 and a secretary of state for Scotland since 1926. A Scottish Grand Committee, composed of all the Scottish MPs, had exerted significant control over the details of Scottish legislation since the nineteenth century. Thus, although Scottish Gaelic was spoken by only seventy thousand people in the Highlands and western islands (about 1.5 percent of the Scottish population) in 1960, and although the old Scots language of Robert Burns had become little more than a dialect of English, Scottish nationalism rested on sound, if incomplete, institutional foundations. What was needed, from the Scottish point of view, was a Home Rule parliament by which Scots could control their own affairs.

The SNP rose rapidly in the 1960s because it was seen as speaking for the Scottish identity. Its support came partly from Scots who wanted a positive expression of Scottishness, partly from those who wanted to protect against the decline of the Scottish economy, and partly from people who were dissatisfied with Labour's centralizing orientation. The SNP was founded in the 1930s, but it was overshadowed by World War II and Labour's electoral victory in 1945. By 1968, however, party membership had grown from two thousand to one hundred thousand. Many of these were converts from Labour, but many others were people who had never been in politics. The SNP won a parliamentary seat in 1967, and in the election of October 1974, it won 30 percent of the Scottish vote and eleven seats.

By 1970, devolution for Scotland had become a major issue. It attracted the support of a variety of Scots: the SNP, the Scottish New Left, the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Trades Union Conference (TUC), and the Scottish Conservative party all supported Scottish Home Rule! As in the case of Wales, Prime Minister Wilson had to do something about devolution in Scotland. He chose to support creation of a Scottish assembly with limited and vaguely defined legislative powers. In Scotland, as in Wales, Wilson's scheme deflated the Home Rule movement. Pro-devolutionists criticized it because it did not go far enough and anti-devolutionists warned of the breakup of Britain. With the Labour party in Scotland divided over the issue, Scottish Conservatives now united against devolution with the slogan "Scotland Says No." When the referendum was held, devolution won a majority of the votes cast, but only 32.9 percent of the *total* electorate voted yes. As in Wales, the referendum silenced the devolution movement in Scotland for the time being. The SNP worked its revenge by helping to bring down the Labour government in 1979. In the subsequent general election of 1979, however, the SNP lost all but two seats although it continued to have a strong presence in local government.

When Margaret Thatcher came into power in 1979, the question of devolution for Scotland as well as Wales seemed settled. Accelerating economic decline under Thatcher, however, led to a surge of support for Scottish nationalism. The recession of the early 1980s and the deindustrializing effects of Thatcher's deflationary policies hit Scotland hard. Between 1979 and 1981, Scotland lost 20 percent of its workforce, and by 1983, one in six Scots was unemployed. During the course of the 1980s, thirteen of Scotland's fifteen coal pits were shut down. Moreover, many Scots perceived Thatcher as having little interest in, awareness of, or concern for their

plight. Charles Kennedy, a Scot and an MP (later the leader of the Liberal Democrats), put it simply in 1983: “At least you know where you stand with Maggie. She hates us and we hate her.”

Scottish fury skyrocketed in 1987 when Thatcher’s government imposed the poll tax on Scottish communities, one year in advance of England and Wales. Scottish Conservatives had requested the early implementation of the scheme, but the majority of Scots concluded that “that bloody woman” had chosen to “experiment” with Scotland because of her contempt for all things Scottish. The Labour party, which was led by Scotsman John Smith in the early 1990s, benefited the most from Scottish hostility toward Thatcher and Major, but Labour policy makers recognized that Scottish nationalism had become a potent force. In the election campaign of 1997 (which saw the Conservative party lose every seat in Scotland), Tony Blair promised radical constitutional changes, including a devolved parliament for Scotland.

THE OTHER ISLAND

As we will see, Blair’s premiership would also bring dramatic changes to the most troubled region of the United Kingdom: Northern Ireland. Since its creation in 1920, Northern Ireland (the six northeastern counties of Ulster) was the scene of division, conflict, and violence, but in the late 1960s the violence escalated dramatically and highlighted a simple but tragic fact: neither as a society nor as a political unit did Northern Ireland work; throughout the twentieth century, Northern Ireland was Britain’s most grievous failure.

To understand events in Northern Ireland, we must recognize that the province suffered from a *cultural conflict* (and still does): two cultures had come to exist in Ulster, and each felt threatened by the other. Religion was at the core of these two cultures, but more than religion was involved, and religious beliefs and practice played an increasingly smaller role in either community over time. The key fact was that neither culture recognized the other as legitimate. One, that of 48 percent of the population, was (and is) Protestant and Unionist (that is, determined to maintain union with Britain); the other, that of 45 percent of the population, was (and is) Catholic and tends to be nationalist (that is, loyal to the idea of an Irish nation). The majority define themselves as British; the minority as Irish.

How did these two different cultures come to exist in Northern Ireland? It is important to remember that the Northern Ireland Protestants, many of



Divided Ireland. The map of divided Ireland showcases the curious national and political situation there. Northern Ireland is often referred to as “the North,” and the Republic of Ireland as “the South,” yet as the map shows, the northernmost part of the Irish island actually lies within the Republic. Northern Ireland is often also called “Ulster;” yet it actually contains only six of the nine counties of the province of Ulster. With the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, border controls between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland have been dismantled.



The problem of Northern Ireland. *Anti-Catholic graffiti in Belfast; UVF stands for Ulster Volunteer Force, a Protestant paramilitary group.*

whom are Presbyterians of some variety, descended from the settlers planted in Ulster by the English Crown in the seventeenth century. The Protestant settlers included not only landowners but also tenant farmers and craftsmen. As a result, the Protestant community in Ulster in the twentieth century included both upper-class and working-class people who regarded the Union and British power as their guarantee of security. The Home Rule movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reinforced their fear of being swallowed up by a Catholic, nationalist Ireland. Hence their “fortress mentality” by 1914 had brought them near civil war. Although they had opposed Home Rule fanatically, they found themselves in possession of a separate Home Rule Parliament in the six most heavily Protestant counties of Ulster in 1920.

Their two-to-one majority over the Catholics of Northern Ireland gave the Protestants of Northern Ireland little sense of security. As we saw in chapter 24, they set up a structure of public oppression and private discrimination against the minority while the British government simply looked the other way. Unionists regarded the Catholic minority as subversive of the new province. To an extent, they were right, for the Catholic minority’s sympathies lay with the Irish Free State and Irish nationalism. Most Catholics of Northern Ireland did believe that Northern Ireland was an illegitimate province and that the Protestant Unionists were not genuinely Irish.

As far as the Protestant Unionists were concerned, this minority disloyalty was worsened by developments in the Irish Free State, the twenty-six counties of southern and western Ireland. From the moment of its creation, the Free State claimed theoretical sovereignty over all of Ulster. Moreover, under the leadership of the enigmatic but magnetic Eamon de Valera during the 1930s, the Free State moved toward cutting all ties with Britain. In 1937 de Valera introduced a new constitution that made Ireland an independent republic outside the Commonwealth in all but name. In 1949, the Republic of Ireland Act made that name official. In the years in between, as we saw in chapter 27, de Valera's government kept Ireland at least officially neutral during World War II, a stance that infuriated patriotic Britons.

In addition, for Protestants in Northern Ireland, the society that emerged in independent Ireland possessed little appeal. Both as the Free State and as the Republic, Ireland held true to de Valera's vision of a Gaelic, Catholic, and rural nation. The government tried hard to protect the Irish language, both by preserving the *Gaeltacht* (the small, Gaelic-speaking area in the west of Ireland) and by requiring all students to study Irish in school. As for Catholicism, Article 44 of de Valera's constitution of 1937 was incorporated by the Republic, and it acknowledged the "special position" of Roman Catholicism as the religion of the majority of the people. Legislation outlawed divorce and contraception. Irish social provision was well behind that of Britain, with the Catholic Church serving as a main provider of medical, educational, and social services, and the Catholic bishops exerting a strong influence on public policy. Meanwhile, de Valera's ruralist ideals and quest for Irish economic self-sufficiency meant continuing economic stagnation. The Irish remained some of the poorest people in Western Europe.

Determined to avoid unification with Ireland at all costs, the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland established a political structure that systematically discriminated against the Catholic minority. Unionists completely dominated the provincial governmental institutions, which controlled social welfare, education, and the local economy. Northern Ireland's Home Rule parliament, *Stormont*, passed a Special Powers Act in 1922, giving the government extraordinary authority to maintain public order and to put down Irish nationalist activity. In 1929 Stormont abolished proportional representation, which was supposed to guarantee representation of the Catholic minority. The Unionist party regularly won at least two-thirds of the seats at Stormont and almost all of Northern Ireland's seats in the British Parliament. Unionists monopolized local government by gerryman-

dering constituency boundaries. The police (the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the B-Specials) were almost exclusively Protestant, as were the judges and magistrates.

Northern Ireland from the outset, then, was a segregated society. One of the few things that Catholics and Protestants could agree on was that there would be no mixed education. The state schools in the province, therefore, were (and are) almost exclusively Protestant, and Catholic children attended Catholic schools, which were heavily supported by the Ulster government. The curricula of the two school systems—and above all the history taught in them—differed widely. Residential patterns became sharply segregated, partly by personal preference and partly because of Unionist control of local government and therefore housing. Protestants and Catholics came to display a strong sense of territoriality about their neighborhoods. Most marriages took place *within* the two religious groups. Social organizations from clubs to newspapers were entirely separate. Employers tended to hire only their fellow coreligionists, and because most big employers were Protestants, this practice discriminated against Catholics. As one prominent Unionist said in 1933: “I would appeal to Loyalists, therefore, to employ good Protestant lads and lasses.”

The result of this political and social segregation in Northern Ireland was that Protestants and Catholics developed very different views of themselves and their world. Protestant children learned British history and celebrated British heroes and holidays. Catholic children learned Irish history and drank in a powerful dose of Irish nationalist mythology in which the English were the eternal villains. The Unionists believed that, because their ancestors came to Ulster as early as the seventeenth century, they had a right to be there. Every summer, when the Northern Ireland Protestants celebrated the great moments in their history—the anniversaries of the Battle of the Boyne and the relief of the Siege of Londonderry—they paraded through Catholic neighborhoods, pounding their huge Lambeg drums and carrying banners with pictures of William of Orange (“Good King Billy”) and the queen. The Catholic minority responded by flying the tricolor of the Irish Republic.

THE RETURN OF THE TROUBLES TO NORTHERN IRELAND

The 1960s brought an end to this uneasy status quo. During the 1950s and early 1960s, a growing number of Ulster Catholics began to change their attitudes toward the Northern Ireland province. Partly because of the

rise of ecumenism within the Roman Catholic church, and partly because they appreciated the benefits of the British welfare state, many Ulster Catholics began to consider reaching an accommodation with the Northern Ireland government. Many young Catholics had taken the opportunity of attending universities, and this experience widened their horizons. To a degree they were liberated from the mythology of "the Green Flag." Thus, although they did not abandon all hope of reuniting with the Republic, many Ulster Catholics began to think that they could benefit for the time being from winning full rights as citizens of Northern Ireland.

Out of this changed atmosphere came the Northern Ireland civil rights movement. Beginning in 1967, civil rights activists marched and demonstrated for equal treatment in politics, employment, and the law. The movement was made up of middle-class people, mostly young men and women, whose political views ranged from liberal to radical socialist. They demanded an end to political gerrymandering and equal opportunities in housing, education, and employment, not reunification with Ireland. Inspired by the African American civil rights crusade, they believed in non-violent tactics and adopted the American hymn "We Shall Overcome."

When Unionists saw the civil rights protesters marching in the streets, however, they looked through the lenses of their own experiences: for them, the march was a key symbol of Unionist dominance in Northern Ireland, and thus these Catholic marchers were challenging Unionist power. They recognized that full civil rights for the minority inevitably would spell a reduction of the power of the majority. The civil rights campaign thus stirred up deeply held emotions and threatened the personal and national identity of Ulster Unionists. Many reacted violently. In 1968–69, Unionists attacked civil rights marchers with bricks, stones, and clubs in plain view of the television cameras. The police stood by and watched the mayhem or joined in it themselves.

As the Unionist countermovement grew, the Reverend Ian Paisley (1926–), who pastored a fundamentalist Presbyterian church in Belfast, emerged as a key leader. Passionately anti-Catholic and anticommunist, Paisley somewhat confusingly linked the two. He regarded the Roman Catholic Church and the Soviet government (as well as liberal Protestants who supported ecumenism) as part and parcel of an international movement to subvert the true Christian religion. For Paisley, the Catholic civil rights movement was simply a cover for a far more nefarious conspiracy to destroy not only the Union of Britain and Northern Ireland, but also capital-

ism and Protestant Christianity. A charismatic speaker, he soon attracted the support of working-class Unionists who had little interest in religion but who believed their way of life was under attack.

By the summer of 1969, the situation in Northern Ireland was sliding toward continual unbridled violence. In Belfast, people were killed in Protestant-Catholic riots. In Derry, Catholics of the poor Bogside neighborhood battled the police for three days. Finally, in August 1969, Harold Wilson's Labour government sent the British army into Northern Ireland to restore the peace; no one at the time expected that *Operation Banner* would become the longest lasting military operation in British history. The Catholic community at first welcomed the army as its defender against the Protestant majority and the partisan police force, but unfortunately, the arrival of the army coincided with the revival of the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

The IRA from 1921 had refused to accept the legitimacy of either Northern Ireland or the Free State. Its soldiers saw themselves as the rightful army of the sacred Irish Republic proclaimed by the Easter Rising rebels in 1916. Throughout the decades since 1921, the IRA had carried out attacks against targets in both Northern Ireland and the Free State; during World War II, it actively conspired with German intelligence against Britain. In the early 1960s, however, the IRA took a Marxist turn and argued that Protestant and Catholic workers should join to fight the forces of economic and political repression. Thus, when Unionist mobs in 1969 attacked the civil rights marchers and Catholic neighborhoods, the IRA took no action. The bitter joke, which appeared as graffiti on Belfast walls, was that IRA stood for "I ran away."

But as the violence intensified, IRA veterans in Northern Ireland began to demand that the organization take up arms to protect Catholic communities. The result was that, in December 1989, the IRA split. Whereas the official IRA continued to argue that all of Ireland would have to become socialist before it could genuinely be free, the new Provisional IRA (the *Provos*) opted for a back-to-basics approach. It not only moved to defend beleaguered Catholics in Belfast, Derry, and elsewhere, but it also renewed the old campaign of violence on behalf of a united independent Ireland.

For the Provos, the arrival of the British army meant the return of their old enemy. They saw the British soldiers not as impartial peacekeepers, but as colonialist oppressors. Hence, the Provisional IRA began a savage campaign of shootings and bombings against the British army as well as the

Ulster police and Unionist paramilitary organizations. Murder, assassinations, bombings, and knee-cappings (shooting victims in the knees) became the order of the day, as did death tolls of nonparticipants caught in the struggle. “The Troubles” had returned.

The army’s efforts to flush out the IRA from Catholic neighborhoods soon came to seem like an assault on the entire Catholic community. In July 1971, army troops killed two young Catholics in Derry, and when the Stormont government refused to investigate, the small delegation of Catholic representatives in the Stormont Parliament withdrew. The next month, Stormont ordered the army to implement the tactics of *internment*—arrest and imprisonment without trial of IRA suspects and sympathizers. The move played directly into the hands of the IRA: men rounded up unjustly and sometimes tortured proved willing recruits for the IRA cause.

The turning point came at the beginning of 1972. On a Sunday in January, British troops fired on a peaceful anti-internment protest in Derry; fourteen men and boys, none with links to the IRA, were killed. “Bloody Sunday” sealed the fate of the Stormont government, which plainly could neither maintain order nor claim the confidence of the minority community. In 1972, the British government suspended the Northern Ireland government and established *direct rule* of the province from London.

The British now presided over a vicious three-sided war in Northern Ireland. On the first side was the British army, working with the overwhelmingly Protestant police, supposedly as a neutral force keeping the Ulster Protestants and Catholics from slaughtering each other. On the second side was the Provisional IRA and splinter groups such as the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA). As always, financial contributions from Irish-Americans underlay these terrorist organizations. They also had a legal front in the Ulster branch of the old Sinn Féin party. On the third side were the paramilitary forces of the Ulster Unionists—most notably, the Ulster Defence Association and the UVF. These Unionist forces were closely connected with Unionist political parties and the Orange Lodges, and they often benefitted from official British Army intelligence, though this collusion was not known at the time. The spirit of this conflict was well expressed in a UVF declaration of 1966; “From this day we declare war against the IRA and its splinter groups. Known IRA men will be executed mercilessly and without hesitation.” The violence inevitably spilled over to civilians thought to be sympathetic to one side or another—and to innocent bystanders—as bombs went off in pubs and shopping districts. Between 1969 and mid-1976, more than

fifteen hundred people were killed in Northern Ireland, and between 1976 and 1989 some fifteen hundred more.

THE LONG ROAD TOWARD PEACE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The British goal remained what it had long been: to get Irish troubles off the British political agenda. Throughout the period, therefore, the British hoped that conditions would improve so as to allow them to restore devolved government to Northern Ireland. But the British government now realized that devolution in Ulster would require that the Catholic minority have a voice in any provincial government. *Power sharing* became the accepted principle. Some moderates in the Catholic community, including the main opposition party, the Social Democratic and Labour party (SDLP), approved of power sharing, but the IRA and most of the Unionist majority opposed it. The British pressed on with their plans, and during a lull in the fighting in 1974, they won agreement from moderate Protestants and Catholics to a power-sharing executive council for Northern Ireland. This was the Sunningdale Agreement. The council, which included representatives of the Catholic minority, met in January 1974; however, it amounted to only a temporary triumph of hope over reality. In the spring of 1974, a massive strike by militant Protestant trade unionists, supported by Paisley, brought the council and the Sunningdale Agreement down. Direct rule was reestablished.

The horrors of the terrorist war continued. From the mid-1970s, the IRA extended the violence into England, hoping to force the British public to decide that keeping Northern Ireland was not worth the effort. In 1974, an IRA bomb blew up a pub in Guildford, killing five and wounding fifty-four, and then bombs killed twenty-one people in Birmingham pubs. In May 1979, an IRA squad assassinated the Conservative party spokesman on Northern Ireland, Airey Neave, in the House of Commons parking lot; in that same year Earl Mountbatten, who had been Britain's last viceroy of India, was blown up on his yacht at Sligo. Explosions killed shoppers as well as troopers of the Horse Guards in London.

By the time Margaret Thatcher assumed the premiership, the tempo of violence seemed unstoppable. Thatcher sympathized strongly with the Unionist community and was implacable in her opposition to the IRA. In 1981, she stubbornly refused to give in to a hunger strike staged by IRA and INLA prisoners in Belfast. These prisoners were demanding that they be

treated as *political prisoners* rather than as criminals. They refused to eat until the British government changed their status. The first of the hunger strikers, Bobby Sands, died in May 1981, after going sixty-six days without food. The violence in Northern Ireland crescendoed as Sands became a popular hero, yet another martyr for the cause of Irish nationalism. By August of 1981, nine more hunger strikers had died. Despite immense pressure from British—and American—public opinion, Thatcher and her government stood firm and let the strikers die one by one until the Catholic Church in Ireland and family members of the men refusing food intervened and forced the IRA to call off the strike.

Thatcher's refusal to regard the hunger strikers as anything other than murderers who had chosen to take their own lives (a choice, she noted, they had not given their victims) made her a figure of absolute loathing to the nationalist community in Belfast. In the summer of 1984, then, the IRA targeted the prime minister. A bomb destroyed the Grand Hotel in Brighton, where the Conservative party was meeting. Thatcher narrowly escaped injury but five people died and another thirty-one were injured.

Ironically, the IRA assassination attempt occurred while Thatcher was in the midst of the negotiations that led to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, which we can now see as the first significant step toward reaching a settlement in Northern Ireland. How do we explain this extraordinary turn of events? First, the government of the Irish Republic, itself long a target of the IRA, was increasingly willing to cooperate with the British in trying to resolve the problem of Northern Ireland. As early as 1972 the Republic had tried to make itself less threatening to Ulster Protestants by removing from its constitution Article 44, which gave special status to the Catholic Church. By 1980 the Republic had admitted officially that Northern Ireland *was* after all a province of Britain and that although reunification remained the ultimate goal, it could occur only by *persuasion* of the Northern Ireland majority, not by force.

In that spirit, Irish *taoiseach* (prime minister) Garrett Fitzgerald (1926–2011) worked with Thatcher to construct the Anglo-Irish Agreement (also called the Hillsborough Agreement) of 1985. Despite her Unionist sympathies, Thatcher came to the negotiating table because she wanted the Irish to agree to strengthened security arrangements in and for Northern Ireland. Fitzgerald, in contrast, wanted British agreement to a plan for shared sovereignty in Northern Ireland. Thatcher would not acknowledge that Northern Ireland was anything but a British province; still, both sides got some of what they wanted in the Agreement. It reaffirmed British sov-

ereignty over Northern Ireland and declared that any change in Northern Ireland's status would come only when a majority in Northern Ireland so desired, but it also acknowledged the existence of *two* cultures in Northern Ireland, the Catholic nationalist and the Protestant Unionist, and recognized the need to reconcile the two. On the practical level, the Agreement established a continuing intergovernmental conference, with representatives from both Britain and Ireland, to advise both states as to matters of law enforcement, justice, cultural exchanges, and the like.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement was not a solution to the Northern Ireland problem, but it was a step in that direction. Although both the IRA and the militant Ulster Unionists denounced the agreement, they were not able to force Britain and Ireland to abandon it, either by terrorism or by strikes. The normalization of relations between Britain and the Irish Republic proved crucial in the quest for peace in Northern Ireland. Ireland had come to realize its own need for peace and security in Northern Ireland, and the British to recognize both the seriousness of Irish intentions and the reliability of the Republic as a negotiating partner.

Important changes underway in the Republic also helped create the conditions that made movement toward a peace settlement possible. By the time of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, Ireland had moved far from de Valera's Gaelic, Catholic, and rural ideal. In 1959 de Valera had ascended to the nation's presidency, a nonpolitical position as head of state. His successor as prime minister and leader of Fianna Fáil was Sean Lemass (1899–1971), who committed the government to an extensive plan of economic expansion through investment, tax incentives, and government direction of the economy. Observers talked of an Irish "mini-Industrial Revolution." Production and living standards went up during the 1960s, and unemployment and emigration declined. New factories, housing developments, automobiles, and television became common features of Irish life. At the same time, national attitudes began to open up; the rather stagnant, closed, censorious quality of Irish culture began to break down. Secularization slowly eroded the authority of the Catholic Church and promoted more cosmopolitan values.

It was in that spirit of expansion that Ireland applied for, and was accepted to, membership in the European Common Market in 1973, an important step in not only in Irish economic development, but also in the normalization of relations between Ireland and Britain. In the 1970s and 1980s, Ireland took advantage of the European Community's common agricultural policy as well as its industrial investment in the less developed European nations. By the 1990s, the opening of the huge European market to the

agricultural and manufacturing products of Ireland had attracted much foreign investment to Ireland, freed Ireland from its long-standing dependence on the British economy, and enabled the Irish to achieve a much higher growth rate than Britain. These changes liberated Irish politicians from their traditional inferiority complex in dealing with the British and accustomed British leaders to dealing with the Irish on terms of equality.

In the late 1980s, however, little movement toward any kind of peace settlement occurred. Thatcher came to regard the Anglo-Irish Agreement as a mistake; she regretted what she believed had been a betrayal of the Unionist community and would move no further down the peace road. In 1989, however, Thatcher stepped down. Her successor, John Major, was far less of a Unionist and eager to find a way to stop the continuing violence. The result was the Downing Street Declaration, an agreement forged by Major and Irish *taoiseach* Albert Reynolds (1932–) in December 1993. In a momentous move, Major and Reynolds declared that reunification of Northern Ireland with the Irish Republic was acceptable—but only if the majority in Northern Ireland agreed—and that any organization in Northern Ireland, including *Sinn Féin*, could participate in peace negotiations, provided it renounced violence. Reynolds also pledged that the Irish Republic would, in the event of a peace settlement, abandon its longstanding claim to sovereignty over the entire Irish island.

At the same time, significant changes underway within the ranks of the IRA and *Sinn Féin* signaled that a peace settlement just might be possible. The military standoff in Northern Ireland persuaded important elements in the IRA command that the IRA could not drive the British army out of Northern Ireland. By the time of the Downing Street Declaration, Gerry Adams (1948–), former IRA soldier and now president of *Sinn Féin*, increasingly perceived the political process rather than military force, the ballot rather than the bomb, as the way forward.

Peace talks, however, proved enormously difficult to get started. Hardliners among both the Catholic nationalists and the Protestant Unionists condemned the Downing Street Declaration as a betrayal of their interests and ideals. Adams, however, persuaded a majority in the IRA to try the peace process, and in August 1994 the IRA declared a cease-fire. The Protestant paramilitaries were coaxed into following suit in October. For the first time in twenty-five years, the people of Northern Ireland celebrated Christmas in peace. Yet the promised talks still did not begin, largely because John Major now declared that *Sinn Féin* could not participate unless and until the IRA

disarmed. Such a demand contradicted the Downing Street Declaration, but Major was held hostage to political realities: a series of by-election defeats had so reduced the Conservatives' parliamentary majority that the survival of Major's government depended on the votes of Ulster Unionist MPs.

The impasse over disarmament of the IRA soon led to a new spasm of violence. In February 1996, the IRA broke its cease-fire with a series of bombings in London, followed by an explosion in Manchester's central shopping center that injured more than two hundred people. By the end of 1996, the Protestant paramilitary organizations were responding in kind. Peace, once again, seemed impossible.

DEVOLUTION: PEACE IN NORTHERN IRELAND BUT THE END OF BRITAIN?

New Labour's massive victory in the general election of May 1997 ushered in a new era in the history of the nations that make up Britain. In Northern Ireland, the new prime minister, Tony Blair, orchestrated a peace agreement that remains his most impressive achievement. Devolution was an important part of this agreement: Stormont (Northern Ireland's regional parliament) was reconstituted. Stormont was not the only devolved assembly that convened in the late 1990s, however. In both Wales and Scotland, the Labour government introduced devolution in an effort to weaken the appeal of nationalist independence movements. In Scotland, however, things did not go quite as Tony Blair had planned.

We begin with the momentous events in Northern Ireland. Labour's victory in 1997 broke the political logjam that had stalled the peace process. Unlike Major, Blair did not depend on the votes of Ulster Unionist MPs, and Unionism was not a part of the British Labour tradition. Blair thus acted quickly in Northern Ireland. He went to Belfast and made it clear that all parties should promptly join the negotiations. In June 1997, he signaled the new British attitude toward Ireland by apologizing for the British role in the Great Famine of 1845–50, and he directed British officials to meet with representatives of Sinn Fein. He reassured the Unionists that no change would be made in the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority in the province, but he told Sinn Fein that it could participate in peace negotiations if the IRA would simply renew its cease-fire for six weeks and agree to abide by democratic procedures. Blair also strongly hinted to all Northern Ireland parties that, if *they* did not reach a settlement, then the British and Irish governments would do it *for* them.

The peace talks in Northern Ireland thus finally began in October 1997, under the chairmanship of United States Senator George Mitchell (1933–), who had been appointed by President Bill Clinton to go to Northern Ireland as a neutral mediator. Blair's plan (based substantially on a joint proposal issued in 1995 by John Major and Irish prime minister John Bruton) called for devolution in Northern Ireland, plus a cross-border council with advisory powers on Northern Ireland, made up of representatives from both Northern Ireland and the Republic. The new provincial assembly would be elected by proportional representation to ensure that the Catholic minority would have an adequate voice, and the provincial executive, which would be responsible to the assembly, would likewise be formed on a power-sharing basis.

Almost every item on the agenda of the peace conference was extremely controversial because mistrust built over the decades still poisoned the atmosphere. Only the remarkable patience and transparent honesty of Senator Mitchell, as well as the ability of Gerry Adams and moderate Unionist leader David Trimble (1944–) to drag their recalcitrant colleagues along, kept the talks together. Finally, on Good Friday (April 10) 1998, the various parties agreed to the main points of the settlement proposed by Blair. The Good Friday Agreement was then ratified by referenda in Northern Ireland (71.1% to 28.9%) and in the Irish Republic (94% to 5.6%). It promised to put an end to thirty years of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, however, proved to be far from easy. The Ulster Unionists and Sinn Fein sharply disagreed on the timing of IRA disarmament, and extremists on both sides tried to wreck the peace process by resorting to violence. As the twenty-first century opened, it still seemed that the Good Friday Agreement could unravel at any moment, so deep were the bitterness and mistrust in Northern Ireland. But finally, in July 2005 the IRA renounced violence altogether, and by September 2005 had decommissioned (destroyed) all of its arms. At Stormont, men who once planted bombs and planned assassinations sat alongside their former enemies and got down to the nitty-gritty of provincial government while on the streets of Belfast and Derry former IRA men now led "Troubles tours" for growing numbers of tourists.

At the same time that these momentous developments were underway in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales were also embarking on a new era. Sensitive to the appeal of Scottish and Welsh nationalism, Blair in the campaign of 1997 had made devolution the key element in his policy of decentralizing power away from London. Many British (and especially English)



The Scottish Parliament Building in Edinburgh. *Dogged by controversy throughout its construction, the building opened in 2004, three years past schedule and at a final cost ten times the original estimate. Nevertheless, it has been acclaimed as a modern architectural masterpiece and a source of Scottish nationalist pride.*

nationalists argued that devolution of any significant power to a Scottish parliament and a Welsh assembly would lead to the breakup of Britain; some Scottish and Welsh nationalists gave credibility to that point of view by envisioning devolution as the first step toward complete independence. Blair, however, contended that devolution would satisfy reasonable Scottish and Welsh national sentiment and thereby tie Scotland and Wales to the United Kingdom more firmly than ever.

The referenda of 1997 resulted in victories for devolution in both Scotland and Wales. In Scotland, 74 percent of the voters favored establishing a parliament and 64 percent favored tax-varying powers for the new parliament. In Wales, devolution won by a narrower majority. Elections for the Scottish parliament and Welsh assembly were held in May 1999, with Labour candidates given stiff competition by the SNP and Plaid Cymru. Both elections were conducted according to proportional representation, a constitutional innovation long advocated by the British Liberals and now adopted by Blair and Labour as part of their modernizing thrust. Labour came out on top in both Scotland and Wales, but failed to win an outright majority in either. Both the SNP and Plaid Cymru were encouraged by their

second-place finishes, whereas the Conservative party did poorly. Meanwhile, both of the new Home Rule legislatures convened in the summer of 1999, amidst much celebration by Scottish and Welsh nationalists. In both Cardiff and Edinburgh, the erection of stunning new buildings to house the new legislatures symbolized for many the rebirth of their nations.

At first, the powers of the devolved legislatures were quite limited, particularly in Wales, where the National Assembly had no law-making power. The Government of Wales Act of 2006 however, granted the Assembly the right to pass “measures” (laws dealing with Welsh affairs), and in 2011 a large majority of Welsh voters said yes to a referendum on expanding the Assembly’s legislative remit. Similarly, the Scotland Act of 2012 further devolved legislative power from Westminster to Edinburgh.

Blair’s confidence that devolution would satisfy Scottish and Welsh nationalists proved to be misplaced, at least in the case of Scotland. As a result of elections in 2007, the SNP became the largest party in the Scottish parliament and, with the support of the Scottish Green party, formed a minority government. Five years later, the SNP won an outright majority. Led by Alex Salmond (1954–), an economist who had been active in Scottish nationalist politics since he was a university student in the 1970s, the SNP demanded full Scottish independence (and ownership of Britain’s North Sea oil reserves) and declared that a referendum on Scottish independence would be held in 2014. British Prime Minister David Cameron declared that making sure the referendum failed was one of his highest priorities.

At the time of this writing, the success or failure of the Scottish independence referendum is very much an open question. What is not open to doubt, however, is that devolution contributed to a British national identity crisis. This was particularly true of the English people. Some English nationalists were beginning to resent the fact that Scottish MPs could vote on purely English issues at Westminster, whereas English MPs could not vote on purely Scottish matters. There is now talk of one or more regional parliaments for England alone, with Westminster evolving into a parliament for pan-British issues and foreign affairs. Whether Britain would break up, remain united, or become a federal state was anyone’s guess in the early twenty-first century.

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Appendix A

Kings and Queens of Great Britain, 1685–2014

Monarch	House	Reign
James II (of England and James VII of Scotland)	Stuart	1685–88
William III and Mary II	Stuart	William: 1688–1702; Mary: 1688–94
Anne I (of the United Kingdom)	Stuart	1702–14
George I	Hanover	1714–27
George II	Hanover	1727–60
George III	Hanover	1760–1820
George IV	Hanover	1820–30
William IV	Hanover	1830–37
Victoria I	Hanover	1837–1901
Edward VII	Windsor	1901–10
George V	Windsor	1910–36
Edward VIII	Windsor	1936
George VI	Windsor	1936–1952
Elizabeth II	Windsor	1952–

Appendix B

Chief Cabinet Ministers, 1721–2014

The modern party system is not regarded as having come into existence until the late eighteenth century. Hence, party affiliations in this list are given from William Pitt the Younger (1783). Before that time, all of the king's ministers were of the Whig persuasion.

Minster	Post*	Dates	Party
Sir Robert Walpole	First Lord of the Treasury	1721–42	
John Carteret	Secretary of State, Northern Department	1742–44	
Henry Pelham	First Lord of the Treasury	1744–54	
Duke of Newcastle	First Lord of the Treasury	1754–56	
William Pitt (the Elder)	Secretary of State, Southern Department	1756–57	
Duke of Newcastle	First Lord of the Treasury	1757–61	
William Pitt (the Elder)	Secretary of State, Southern Department		
Duke of Newcastle	First Lord of the Treasury	1761–62	
Earl of Bute	Secretary of State, Northern Department		
Earl of Bute	First Lord of the Treasury	1762–63	
George Grenville	First Lord of the Treasury	1763–65	
Marquess of Rockingham	First Lord of the Treasury	1765–66	
William Pitt (the Elder), Earl of Chatham	Lord Privy Seal	1766–68	
Duke of Grafton	First Lord of the Treasury	1767–70	
Lord North	First Lord of the Treasury	1770–82	

Minster	Post*	Dates	Party
Marquess of Rockingham	First Lord of the Treasury	1782	
Charles James Fox	Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs		
Earl of Shelburne	First Lord of the Treasury	1782–83	
William Pitt (the Younger)	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
Charles James Fox	Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs	1783	
Lord North	Secretary of State for Home Affairs		
William Pitt (the Younger)	Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury	1783–1801	Tory
Henry Addington	Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury	1801–04	Tory
William Pitt (the Younger)	Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury	1804–06	Tory
Lord Grenville	Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury	1806–07	Whig
Charles James Fox	Foreign Secretary		
Duke of Portland	Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury	1807–09	Tory
Spencer Perceval	Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury	1809–12	Tory
Earl of Liverpool	Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury	1812–27	Tory
Viscount Castlereagh	Foreign Secretary		
George Canning	Prime Minister	1827	Tory
Viscount Goderich	Prime Minister	1827	Tory
Duke of Wellington	Prime Minister	1828–30	Tory
Sir Robert Peel	Home Secretary		
Earl Grey	Prime Minister	1830–34	Whig
Lord Brougham	Lord Chancellor		
Viscount Melbourne	Prime Minister	1834	Whig
Sir Robert Peel	Prime Minister	1834–35	Conservative
Viscount Melbourne	Prime Minister	1835–41	Whig

Minster	Post*	Dates	Party
Viscount Palmerston	Foreign Secretary		
Sir Robert Peel	Prime Minister	1841–46	Conservative
Lord John Russell	Prime Minister	1846–52	Whig
Viscount Palmerston	Foreign Secretary		
Earl of Derby	Prime Minister	1852	Conservative
Benjamin Disraeli	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
Earl of Aberdeen	Prime Minister	1852–55	Peelite/Whig
William E. Gladstone	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
Viscount Palmerston	Prime Minister	1855–58	Whig
Earl of Derby	Prime Minister	1858–59	Conservative
Benjamin Disraeli	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
Viscount Palmerston	Prime Minister	1859–65	Liberal
William E. Gladstone	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
Lord John Russell	Prime Minister	1865–66	Liberal
William E. Gladstone	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
Earl of Derby	Prime Minister	1866–68	Conservative
Benjamin Disraeli	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
William E. Gladstone	Prime Minister	1868–74	Liberal
Benjamin Disraeli	Prime Minister	1874–80	Conservative
William E. Gladstone	Prime Minister	1880–85	Liberal
Joseph Chamberlain	President of the Board of Trade		
Marquess of Salisbury	Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary	1885–86	Conservative
William E. Gladstone	Prime Minister	1886	Liberal
Marquess of Salisbury	Prime Minister	1886–92	Conservative (Unionist)
William E. Gladstone	Prime Minister	1892–94	Liberal
Earl of Rosebery	Foreign Secretary		
Earl of Rosebery	Prime Minister	1894–95	Liberal
Sir William V. Harcourt	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
Marquess of Salisbury	Prime Minister	1895–1902	Conservative
A. J. Balfour	First Lord of the Treasury		
Joseph Chamberlain	Colonial Secretary		
A. J. Balfour	Prime Minister	1902–05	Conservative

Minster	Post*	Dates	Party
Joseph Chamberlain	Colonial Secretary		
Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman	Prime Minister	1905–08	Liberal
H. H. Asquith	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
H. H. Asquith	Prime Minister	1908–15	Liberal
David Lord George	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
Sir Edward Grey	Foreign Secretary		
Winston Churchill	President of the Board of Trade and later First Lord of the Admiralty		
H. H. Asquith	Prime Minister	1915–1916	Coalition
David Lloyd George	Minister of Munitions		
David Lloyd George	Prime Minister	1916–1922	Coalition
Andrew Bonar Law	Prime Minister	1922–1923	Conservative
Stanley Baldwin	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
Stanley Baldwin	Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer	1923–1924	Conservative
J. Ramsay MacDonald	Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary	1924	Labour
Stanley Baldwin	Prime Minister	1924–1929	Conservative
Winston Churchill	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
J. Ramsay MacDonald	Prime Minister	1929–1931	Labour
J. Ramsay MacDonald	Prime Minister	1931–1935	National
Stanley Baldwin	Lord President		
Neville Chamberlain	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
Stanley Baldwin	Prime Minister	1935–1937	National
Neville Chamberlain	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
Neville Chamberlain	Prime Minister	1937–1940	Conservative
Winston Churchill	Prime Minister	1940–1945	Coalition
Clement Attlee	Deputy Prime Minister		
Clement Attlee	Prime Minister	1945–1951	Labour
Ernest Bevin	Foreign Secretary		
Aneurin Bevan	Minister of Health		
Winston Churchill	Prime Minister	1951–1955	Conservative
Anthony Eden	Foreign Secretary		

Minster	Post*	Dates	Party
R. A. Butler	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
Sir Anthony Eden	Prime Minister	1955–1957	Conservative
Harold Macmillan	Foreign Secretary		
R. A. Butler	Chancellor the Exchequer		
Harold Macmillan	Prime Minister	1957–1963	Conservative
Sir Alec Douglas-Home	Prime Minister	1963–1964	Conservative
Harold Wilson	Prime Minister	1964–1970	Labour
James Callaghan	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
Edward Heath	Prime Minister	1970–1974	Conservative
Harold Wilson	Prime Minister	1974–1976	Labour
James Callaghan	Foreign Secretary		
James Callaghan	Prime Minister	1976–1979	Labour
Margaret Thatcher	Prime Minister	1979–1990	Conservative
John Major	Prime Minister	1990–1997	Conservative
Tony Blair	Prime Minister	1997–2007	Labour
Gordon Brown	Chancellor of the Exchequer		
Gordon Brown	Prime Minister	2007–2010	Labour
David Cameron	Prime Minister	2010–	Conservative- Liberal Democrat Coalition
Nick Clegg	Deputy Prime Minister	2010–	Conservative- Liberal Democrat Coalition

*The title prime minister was used occasionally in the early eighteenth century, and one can argue plausibly that Sir Robert Walpole (1721–42) was the first prime minister. However, some historians contend that the first of the genuine prime ministers, with complete control over choice of ministers for this cabinet, was William Pitt the Younger (1783–1801). By the early nineteenth century, the title of prime minister was in common use.

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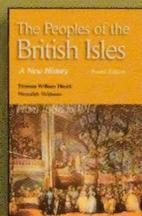
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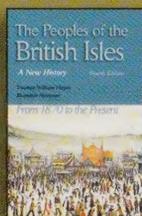
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