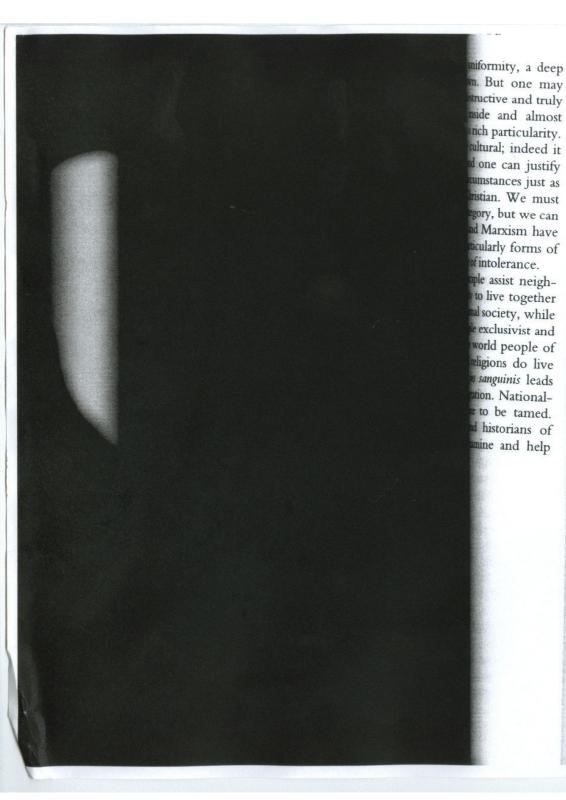# England as prototype

What have I done for you,
England, my England?
What is there I would not do,
England, my own?

William Ernest Henley's poem certainly fits Anderson's dating for a surge of English nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century. We may note in passing that it was still England, not Britain, that Henley hailed as 'chosen daughter of the Lord', but while his poem, like many others, certainly shows that English nationalism was alive and well in the 1880s, it does not at all show where it began, and that is the question which must concern us now. One can find historians to date 'the dawn of English national consciousness' (or some such phrase) in almost every century from the eighth to the nineteenth. If Anderson puts it in the heyday of late Victorian imperialism and Greenfeld in the early years of the Tudor monarchy, others see it as a product of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, the Hundred Years War, the reign of Stephen, the Saxon monarchy in the age of Athelstan and Edgar, or even the Venerable Bede for whom a decisive 'role in defining English national identity and English national destiny' has been claimed by Patrick Wormald.[1]

There is, I suspect, a fairly widespread willingness even among modernists to admit that late Elizabethan England was already becoming a genuinely national society, with tinges of nationalism strongly fed on Protestantism. A vague use of the phrase 'early modern' and equally vague recognition of the Reformation as 'prelude' to modernity may be sufficient to assuage their modernist

suspicions. The nationalism that England would export abroad in the following century and pass on as core to an enlarged British nationalism in the eighteenth was certainly very Protestant, as Linda Colley has stressed, in its self-understanding and sense of righteous mission. But I am afraid it is still not going nearly far enough to admit a post-Reformation beginning to English nationhood. Indeed English post-Reformation nationalism is likely to be itself much misunderstood if it is not recognised to be just a new expression of something already well set several centuries earlier. We may do well at this point to listen to Patrick Wormald and start our pursuit of national identity no later than the age of Bede, even though England in his time was neither a single state nor, except in the eye of Bede himself, at once historian and national prophet, as yet a nation. But with Bede's history firmly behind us we can best approach the late Saxon period and recognise, in the unqualified words of a very recent study by James Campbell, 'the position of 1066'. 'England was by then a nation-state.'[2] Full stop.

Bede wrote his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* about the year 730 in his monastery of Jarrow near the Northumbrian coast. It is a commonplace that England was united ecclesiastically well before it was united politically, that the Archbishop of Canterbury was primate of all England for centuries when there was no king of England, and that Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English* as a single people wonderfully presumes a unity that was far from obvious on the ground. We need, however, to analyse Bede's sense of unity rather more precisely than that.

Throughout the book three different levels of unity are taken for granted. The first, all too easily passed over, is that of Britain, territorially a single island but a unity in ways far beyond that. Britain extends in time as well as in place well beyond the 'gens Anglorum' he is explicitly committed to chronicle. It is the context of the whole story, a Roman context beginning with Julius Caesar. It is extremely symbolic of his thinking that this history of the English people has as its opening word 'Brittania' and, again, that 'Brittania', now united by Christian faith, loyalty to Rome, the leadership of the English and, apparently, even a state of peace and prosperity, is the subject of its final paragraph. The continuity of English history with British history is demonstrated too by the space Bede gives to the story of St Alban, Britain's first martyr, whose cult he seems to suggest

continued unbroken at Verulam. Again, Bede is careful to keep, in his story, not only the tiresome Britons themselves but the Scots and Picts as well. Indeed the last pages of his book are largely devoted to Bishop Ceolfrid's letter to the King of the Picts and events on the island of Iona. The ecclesiastical history Bede set himself to write is clearly not just one of the English people in any narrow sense, despite the opening words of the preface, it is a history of Britain and we have already in Bede the possibility of a certain confusion between England and Britain which twelve hundred years later we have not really overcome.

The second level of unity is the specifically ecclesiastical – a unity dependent upon the archiepiscopal see of Canterbury and the most scrupulous obedience to the apostolic see of Rome. A church centred in Canterbury with bishops in London, Winchester, York, Lindisfarne and elsewhere vastly transcended the political divisions of seven or eight petty kingdoms. In his final chapter Bede stressed that the present Archbishop of Canterbury came from Mercia. The British churches, too, were all, at least theoretically, subject to Canterbury, but the ecclesiastical unity maintained by Canterbury was effectively the unity of the churches of the English. That is the point at which Bede's ecclesiastical history becomes almost necessarily a national history, an account of the 'gens Anglorum'.

This represents the third level at which he implies an existent unity. It is the one which most immediately concerns us, though in his view of things it could only make sense in the context of the other two. Yet it is, in a way, the most unexpected. Bede himself insists that three different Germanic peoples came to Britain – the Saxons, the Angles and the Jutes – and that they set up a whole series of distinct kingdoms, the Jutes in Kent, the Saxons in various southern districts, the Angles in East Anglia, Mercia and North-umbria. Nevertheless by the time he is writing – some three hundred years after the early migrations and a hundred years after their Christian conversion – he takes it for granted that this whole medley of peoples and kingdoms has become a single nation, 'gens Anglor-um', the people of the English, and he regularly uses the name 'English' to include not only Northumbrians and other Angles, but Saxons and Jutes. He does not, however, for one moment, think that it includes the other peoples of Britain – Britons, Scots and Picts. Britain is one but it includes four peoples with four languages. The

English, he has no doubt at all – meaning Saxons, Angles and Jutes – are now a single nation with a single language and a single church.

In his preface, addressed to King Ceolwulf of Northumbria, we get the Bede approach at its most succinct. He is extremely respectful in offering the king this history of his people but he makes it absolutely clear that it is in no way a history of Northumbria alone. On the contrary. It is history centred quite considerably on Canterbury, hugely dependent upon information obtained from a priest in London, and yet something not actually presented as a history of the church at all. It is, indeed, an ecclesiastical history but its subject is the 'gens Anglorum'. Its unity is at least as much that of the nation as that of the church, while being implicitly a history of Brittania too. It is particularly remarkable that at this, the book's defining moment, Northumbria, Mercia and the rest are described simply as 'provincia', the provinces of a single country, even though he is addressing the king of one of them. Bede stresses the continuity of this sort of history with the study of the scriptures, on which he had written so many commentaries, and it is hardly imaginable that he did not see continuity between the history of the people of Israel and the history of his own people. Exactly the same spiritual and providential principles were applicable to both. Each was a nation under God. The English would suffer divine punishment, just as the people of Israel, if they deviated from the right path.

Bede, like the Vulgate, normally uses the word 'gens', not the word 'natio', but in his preface's final paragraph he prefers to use the latter when he reaffirms that he has written the 'historia nostrae nationis', the history of our own nation. Here, then, in his preface for King Ceolwulf we see the first verbal appearance of the English 'nation', something we earlier traced back in the vernacular to the fourteenth century. If the nationalism of intellectuals, the Rousseaus, Herders and Fichtes, precedes the existence of nations, as the modernists argue, and it is their 'imagining' which brings a nation into being, then Bede is undoubtedly the first, and probably the most influential, such case. It is just that he wrote his books in the eighth, and not the nineteenth, century. In his Northumbrian monastery he did indeed imagine England; he did it through intensely biblical glasses, but no less through linguistic and ecclesiastical ones, and he did it so convincingly that no dissentient imagining of his country has ever since seemed quite credible. The very

considerable number of manuscripts of the history surviving – including four from the eighth century – demonstrate how widely Bede's construction of his country's history was welcomed. When, a hundred and fifty years later, Alfred, most imaginative of West Saxon kings, was endeavouring to create a vernacular literature for his people (rather like President Julius Nyerere creating a Swahili literature for Tanzania eleven centuries later and sitting down himself to translate Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*), he decided, unsurprisingly, to translate Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* into English.

It is with Alfred that we begin to move from perceiving the nation to establishing the nation-state. It happened between his reign and that of Edward the Confessor. The very perilousness of England's condition was Alfred's opportunity. The Danish invasions which so nearly swamped his own kingdom of Wessex had completely demolished all the other kingdoms. As the reconquest advanced out of Wessex it could, in consequence, unify the English rather easily. But the sense of a deeper unity, even a political unity, was already there. We see it in Alfred's own codification of law, including that of Offa of Mercia and Ethelbert of Kent as well as Ine of Wessex. If medieval society in particular was ruled by law at least as much as it was ruled by kings, then Alfred's uniting of the laws of various kingdoms was a way of saying that they had already been something of a single political community as well as a linguistic one. His quite extraordinarily precocious attempt to establish a vernacular literature with a programme of translation including Gregory and Boethius as well as Bede was no less nation-forging. The elements, then, are already there with Alfred – national language, national literature, national law and that element of horizontality suggested by the characteristically Saxon institution, the Witan: 'I, Alfred, king of the West Saxons, shewed these to all my Witan, and they then said that it seemed good to them all to be holden.'[3]

In Alfred's time, however, a large portion of the English and of England remained outside his kingdom. The unification of peoples is the achievement of his successors, Danish as well as English. What, however, ensured that the unity of a shared vernacular law was reflected sufficiently in the life of the people as a whole to make of late Saxon England a quite unmistakable nation-state was the triple impact of economic life, political administration and religion. The vitality and regularity of the economy is suggested as well as anything

by the scale and orderliness of the coinage, with literally millions of coins regularly produced throughout the country with dies all of which were cut in London. The combination of centralised control and decentralised production is remarkable. Thus we know of at least forty-four places in which coins were minted in the short nine-month reign of Harold Godwinson, every coin being identified by both the name of its moneyer and the place where it was struck. The late Saxon currency is proof both of the country's economic vitality and of the government's administrative efficiency. When a regular currency was introduced in the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Sweden and Norway, in every case it was modelled on the pennies of Aethelred II.

When speaking of commerce, it is also appropriate to refer to London, already the country's economic capital. The role of London in creating a nation-state can hardly be overemphasised. It was already the heart pumping the economy, but it was more than that. There was no other town of remotely comparable size, but London's national unifying role was so effective because it was neither a regional nor a royal one. London was not Wessex, nor Northumbria, nor the Danelaw. It was only, very marginally, even Mercia. Its identity was very much its own, the point where Saxon, Angle and Jute met but no less the point where the English encountered the continuity of Roman Britain. Nor was London in principle a royal city. The early kings of England are buried at Winchester. Even after the Conquest, Westminster was only one of three places in which the king wore his crown at a major feast, and it is noteworthy that the royal palace developed at Westminster well to the west of the city. Eleventh-century London was also already playing a major independent role in military and political history. Theoretically we cannot as yet call it the capital. In reality, it was so much the capital that it was both creating and sustaining the country around it.

To turn to administration. I have long thought that if there was one institution which produced the English nation it was the shire. The shires were already in place (except north of Tees and Ribble) by the early eleventh century. They were ideally constructed to develop both the reality and the consciousness of a united country. Royal creations, neither feudal nor tribal in origin, they were too small to be seriously separatist yet important enough to focus loyalty in an essentially horizontalist and healthily emulative way, with the shire courts bringing a great many people regularly together, as did service in the local fyrd. The shires – backed by that parallel Saxon institution, the boroughs and borough courts – were to provide the building blocks of the nation for a thousand years.

To commerce and local administration add the church and books, the start of whose impact goes back, as we have seen, to a far earlier date than the political unification of the people. The church of the age of Dunstan was a highly national institution, its life integrated with that of the state in countless ways and productive of a vernacular theology unparalleled elsewhere in pre-twelfth-century Europe. But the English vernacular writing of the tenth and eleventh centuries was by no means all by clerics or for clerics. The scripture translations should have for us a particular significance on account of what we may best call their ideological influence. They included the Gospels and large parts of the Old Testament; with these may be included the Rule of St Benedict and other major ecclesiastical works. To them add the laws, the chronicles, the poetry (30,000 lines of Anglo-Saxon poetry are still extant), the sermons, the medical texts, and the range and quantity of vernacular literature appears quite remarkably rounded and functional for the needs of a nation. As Dorothy Whitelock insisted thirty years ago, 'The glory of the late Anglo-Saxon period was its English writing. At a time when no vernacular prose of any distinction had appeared on the Continent, the Anglo-Saxons had developed a language of great copiousness and flexibility, capable of rendering Latin works on theology, philosophy and science.'[4] Much of this was clearly written for a lay clientele as well as for the clergy. If the equation of a significant vernacular literature and a nation bears any weight at all, it must be applicable here.

Unsurprisingly, it is hard to find explicit expression of nationalist feeling in surviving texts from the old English state but it is worth pointing to a few suggestive passages. National feeling is most manifest in war and it was the Danish invasions which produce here and there a more distinctly national note. One sees it in brief remarks in the chronicles such as the admiring sentence in the account of English resistance in 1010, 'Then stood Cambridgeshire firm',[5] or in many a phrase in The Battle of Maldon, that most stirring of war poems. Here, despite the poem's rather old-fashioned stress on loyalty to the eorl and the duty of dying where he died (which may be seen, though

perhaps mistakenly, as a vertical rather than horizontal bonding) the principal message is simply that of the heroic defence by a mixed band of Englishmen of 'their land, the land of Ethelred the King, the place and the people'. The poem goes out of its way to stress that thanes were fighting side by side with churls, Mercians with East Saxons, a poem about national horizontality, the bonding of men who had 'rallied each other in the wide room where we met at mead, making each man a bigger boast than his brother of the wine-bench'. Byrhtnoth, the doomed earl of Essex, began the battle by rejecting the Viking terms: 'Shall our people, our nation, bear you to go hence with our gold?'[6] *The Battle of Maldon* was surely an appeal to the nation to stand firm against invasion. A third, final, example, comes from the pen of Aelfric, the leading ecclesiastical writer of his time. In a letter to a nobleman named Sigeward he explains the purpose of his translation of the Book of Judith in similar terms: 'It is set down in English in our manner, as an example to you people that you should defend your land against the invading army with weapons.'[7] These examples illustrate well enough national sentiment in the old English state when under attack. England is seen in biblical terms, a nation to be defended as the Israel of the Old Testament was defended. One feels aware of the sense of a people, kingdom and land, something regularly called 'England' though sometimes more grandly 'Britain', holding together local loyalties – old ones to Mercia, new ones to Cambridgeshire – all of which can contribute to the national defence in which Dunnere, 'undaunted churl', deserves mention as much as Elfwine, the thane 'of mighty stock'.

I do not really think one can fault James Campbell's claim that England is to be reckoned a nation-state before 1066. It would certainly seem to possess all the characteristics required for nationhood by Anthony Smith.[8] Perhaps a chief reason why it was at this point centuries ahead of any other west European society lay in the assistance it had received from the clear territorial delimitation granted by an island and a fairly small area, things which the French and the Germans, whose advance in vernacular literature was partially comparable, manifestly lacked. Yet Ireland was more compact territorially and also had a far greater homogeneity of population than England, but it quite failed to develop in the same sort of way. It was not that eleventh-century Ireland lacked the consciousness of its own specific ethnicity, a people distinct from

others, but that this did not lead on, as in England, to the development of a nation-state. The benefits of a defined territoriality, the politically unifying impact of ecclesiastical unity, the contribution of two geniuses, Bede and Alfred, the stabilising of an intellectual and linguistic world through a thriving vernacular literature, the growth of the economy and of an effective professional royal bureaucracy, all these are contributive to a firmly affirmative answer to 'Was England a nation-state in 1066?' When one surveys such a range of factors behind the English leap into early nationhood, it would be arbitrary to regard any one on its own as necessarily decisive.

What happened at the Conquest? For many commentators, Norman rule is held to have wiped out whatever there was of nationhood existent in the preceding age. The wholesale substitution of a new ruling class, the replacement of the English language by French among the rulers and, eventually, for the law; the near disappearance of English literary writing; the fact that England was ruled by people whose political interests lay equally in France; the imposition of feudalism – all this may seem more than enough to demonstrate the absurdity of claiming any sort of nationhood for the England of the post-Conquest period. Not until the fourteenth century, we tended to believe, did anything reasonably describable as the English nation begin to re-emerge. Yet one of the most interesting things in recent medieval historiography has been the increasingly emphatic rejection of such a conclusion.

A number of closely-argued studies by John Gillingham in particular[9] demonstrate, to the contrary, how rapidly the conquered digested the conquerors. If the men were disinherited, their daughters married Normans and taught their children the meaning of Englishness. Of course there were huge changes – one sees it very strikingly in Christian names – nevertheless it looks as if by the middle of the twelfth century an English identity was very clearly being re-established among the country's ruling class. Only rather few of the most powerful men had landed interests on the continent to divide their loyalty, while the structures, administrative system, ecclesiastical order, myths of origin of the country the rest had made their own, remained essentially those of pre-Conquest England. Even the cults of Anglo-Saxon saints, initially under Norman suspicion, had largely survived. The speed of this resurgence and the fact that by the second half of the twelfth century the invaders of

Ireland could be so generally referred to as 'the English'[10] demonstrate as well as anything how thoroughly a sense of English nationhood had taken root in pre-Conquest society. In the reign of William I the English could feel themselves an oppressed people, but by the reign of Henry II or even earlier one has a strong sense in writers like William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, Geoffrey of Monmouth and Aelred of Rievaulx that national identity is being reasserted, an identity tied to the land, 'most noble of islands', and incorporating everyone from Romans to Normans. If Edgar was the model of modern kings and Arthur of ancient ones, everyone could find a place within an ongoing national epic. The Normans were now no different from earlier immigrants. Like the Danes a couple of generations earlier, they might conquer in war but in societal and intellectual terms they were effectively and quickly absorbed. They really had no alternative, given their limited numbers and institutional inferiority. Inside England their survival depended less on domination than upon assimilation.

One thing alone they clung to in some measure for 200 years – the use of French as a language of culture. The near disappearance of literary English for 150 years has been the chief misleader for the evaluation of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Englishness. Undoubtedly the introduction of French and the enhanced use of Latin had a crippling effect on one side of national identity. It did not mean that English as a spoken language was in any danger of abandonment and most people of Norman descent knew it and used it within, at most, two generations. But it would be foolish to doubt that the distinct, self-conscious national identity of England was temporarily weakened by the use of French – even though French could certainly be used for English nationalist purposes, as it was in Geoffrey Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*, which could even glorify the resistance fighter, Hereward the Wake. All the same the renaissance of English writing in the fourteenth century parallels a wider renaissance in the self-consciousness of nationhood.

The Norman infusion into English identity does, however, seem permanently to have modified it in one quite serious way. The English were not dynamically aggressive and the general picture of the relationship of the old English state with its Celtic neighbours was a relatively pacific one. Cornwall was quietly absorbed more than it was conquered. The Normans were different. The one thing they were really good at was conquering people – in England, Sicily, Palestine, Wales or Ireland. And very brutally. As they fused with the English, they turned the latter into potential imperialists, and English nationalism would ever after have an imperialist tone to it, as it did not have before. Bullying does not always work. The Cornish became English without for centuries forsaking their own vernacular; the Welsh never did. From this point of view the Norman infusion was, nevertheless, fateful for our story. If the English gave the world the model of a nation-state, the Normans ensured that it would be an aggressive model, and necessarily productive of counter-nationalism among the ethnicities it overran. They also taught the English the skill they chiefly needed for military success, that of archery.

In 1295, Edward I needed money. He was at war with France, at war with the Welsh and shortly to be at war with the Scots. He was a decidedly imperialist monarch, but when imperialists are in trouble they almost invariably seek to rally support by stirring up nationalism at home. The letters summoning Parliament asserted emphatically that the King of France was planning an invasion and intended to wipe out the English language – a truly detestable plan which may God avert.[11] Who imagined this extraordinary piece of nonsense one does not know, but it is in itself something quite remarkable. The likelihood of the King of France, even if he were to conquer England, wanting to abolish its spoken vernacular is extraordinarily slight given that he already ruled a kingdom of many languages. A few years later Edward's government played the same card again when in 1305 William Wallace was accused at his trial of refusing to spare the life of anyone who spoke English. As Wallace most probably did so himself, as well as many of his soldiers, the charge tells us nothing about him but a lot about England. Though the literary revival of English was still only just beginning, Edward could all the same hardly have been mistaken in thinking that such accusations were likely to raise the hackles of any honest Englishman and produce generous financial support, or show what a dangerous man Wallace was. Language is here quite clearly back at the heart both of national identity and of nationalist fervour.

So is it seventy years later in the Statutes of Kilkenny (1366) though the context is very different. Insistence on the obligation of speaking English in the Irish Pale was partly a matter of desperation – the English grip on Ireland was slipping badly. Control of much of

the country had been lost already and what remained was at risk to the English crown, if its cultural and linguistic Englishness could not be preserved. The Gaelic revival, decreed the Statutes, was to be countered by the cultivation of the English language, English surnames, and of archery, the prohibition of hurling and other Irish sports. Here again the language is recognised as crucial for the survival of English identity and as a usable tool for policies of state.

If in Ireland English could be genuinely at risk as the settlers were gradually Hibernianised, at home the pressure was all the other way. French was fast declining in England just as English was in Ireland. To many people the primacy of a written French seemed increasingly anomalous, indeed insulting. Thus Robert of Gloucester, writing just at the time of Edward I's appeal to save the language from the King of France, complained sadly that there is no land 'that holdeth not to its own speech save England alone', and the anonymous author of the long narrative poem, *Cursor Mundi*, justified in its Prologue his use of the 'Inglis tung' out of love for the 'nacioun' of England, adding that it is little likely that English be praised in France and it is no outrage to give a people its own language.[12] The linguistic nationalism of Robert of Gloucester and the *Cursor Mundi* are all the more important for coming from insignificant clerics in the west and north of the country, and well in advance of the literary revival of the fourteenth century. They are evidence for a continuity of English national consciousness reflected in language comparable to the continuity of English prose about which R.W. Chambers wrote a memorable essay.

A generation later Ranulph Higden complained that it was 'against the usage and manner of all other nations' for children in school to be compelled to leave their own language. By 1385, however, John Trevisa could comment that a change was now general: 'in all the grammar schools of England children leave French and construe and learn in English'. Trevisa pointed out that this had its disadvantages as well as its advantages – they learnt more quickly but if they went abroad they no longer knew the language![13] In 1362, four years before Kilkenny, an English statute had ordered, probably ineffectually, that English should in future be used in the law courts while the following year the Chancellor had opened parliament with a speech in English for the first time.[14] All this suggests a quite rapid shift in the public sense of what was linguistically appropriate, coinciding with anti-French sentiments stimulated by Edward III's wars.

We have already in chapter 1 discussed the translation of the complete Bible into English a few years later. Its impact was considerable, despite Archbishop Arundel's condemnation of it in 1408, as the multitude of surviving manuscripts – copied both before and after 1408 – makes clear. One has the impression that the importance of the Wyclifite Bible has been unduly played down by Protestant and Catholic alike – by Protestants anxious not to weaken the picture of the vernacular Bible as brought to England by the Reformation, by Catholics because it was the work of people suspected of heresy. Yet for our purposes the best literary expression of national maturity to be found in the fourteenth-century English renaissance may still be its most widely read product, the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*. Here you find a thoroughly horizontalist portrait of the nation, people 'from every shire ende of Engelond', professedly brought together by religion, on pilgrimage to a great national shrine, but in fact having a whale of a time, listening to the very best of stories, some of them decidedly risqué. They appear as a remarkably literate group. Doubtless the 'Clerk of Oxenford' was unique in spending all he had 'on bookes', but it is noticeable that the village parson is also characterised as 'a lerned man' yet his brother was the plowman. The Monk, Friar and Prioress represented the traditional clerical end of the social spectrum as did, on the lay side, the Knight and the Frankeleyn, the latter a regular judge in local session and representative of his shire in parliament. But it is all those other people, the Serjeant of the Law, the Doctor of Phisik, the Marchant, the Reeve, the Sumnour and the Pardoner, whose work no less required a functioning literacy. Probably even the members of the urban confraternity – the Haberdasher, Carpenter, Webbe, Dyere and Tapyer – were at least marginally literate. One may recall that the Reeve had in youth, Chaucer tells us, been apprenticed as a carpenter. The Prologue is exciting because it fills out for us so imaginatively the working corps of a nation of a largely middle-class kind – industrial, agricultural, bureaucratic, academic – meeting appropriately enough in London, England's literary as well as commercial and political capital, the home of Chaucer and Gower as it would later be of Thomas More and Ben Jonson, Marlowe and Donne, even of born Midlanders like Shakespeare and Johnson.[15]

The age of Chaucer undoubtedly represents one of the high points in the consolidation of national consciousness and image-making, even architecturally and artistically. It was the age in which Perpendicular architecture – the most purely English style ever practised – was perfected. Superb in technique, buildings like the octagon at Ely, the cloisters at Gloucester, or Westminster Hall, reflect a confidently insular approach, symbolic of an increasingly nationalist culture. Again it was the age of the Wilton Diptych, perhaps the earliest genuine portrait of an English king, depicting the young Richard II kneeling before the Virgin, sponsored by his two patron saints, St Edmund and St Edward and suggesting thereby the symbolic unification of the nation, Angevin dynasty and English past, because both patrons were Saxon kings. Nevertheless it needs to be remembered that the one major factor which frequently made a negative contribution to the ideology and consciousness of the English nation was the monarchy itself. From the twelfth to the fifteenth century its mind was bewitched again and again by the mirage of ruling France and it clung to the use of the French language when it was largely abandoned and even disliked by the nation. It is ironic that the Hundred Years War so greatly increased English national sentiment and anti-French feeling because the purpose of the war was to make the King of England King of France. Despite the far greater strength of the English experience of being a nation-state in the later Middle Ages, the claims of its kings in fact inhibited a convincing assertion of English nationalism in international debate comparable with the French or the Spanish,[16] and while France's favourite national saint was a king, St Louis, England's was an anti-royal hero, Thomas of Canterbury. To put it simplistically – in France, as in Scotland, the kingdom precedes the nation; in England, the nation both precedes, and can even see itself as contrasted with, royal power. We have to find its strengths elsewhere, in such things as parliament and the long bow.

The Statutes of Kilkenny stressed archery as well as language for the making of a true Englishman. That, after all, is how he won his wars – over the Scots, the Irish, or, still more important, the French. The long bow was absolutely vital for both the construction and the achievement of English late medieval nationalism, whipped up particularly by the exertions of the Hundred Years War.[17] If 'One Englishman can annihilate many Scots', as a patriotic song of Edward I's reign put it,[18] how still more exhilarating it was to discover that he could also annihilate plenty of Frenchmen, particularly if they were nobles. A poem written just after Agincourt puts the following words into Henry's mouth: 'thenke be Englysshemen that never wold fle at no batelle, for azenste one of us thowthe there be tene, thenke Christe wil help us in owre ryght'.[19] The English armies of the Hundred Years War were commoner armies of foot soldiers, paid directly when abroad by the king, and they won their battles, Crecy, Agincourt or wherever, largely through use of the long bow. Essentially Shakespeare's patriotic description of Agincourt, with its contrast between the common man on the English side pitted against the feudal nobility on the French, is good history. The English, like the Scots or the Swiss, were nationalised by the very way they fought while the French were not. As May McKisack concluded in her *Oxford History of England* volume on the fourteenth century forty years ago, 'the most lasting and significant consequences of the war should be sought, perhaps, in the sphere of national psychology . . . the victories were the victories, not only of the king and the aristocracy, but of the nation'.[20] And they were victories which generated both Francophobia and a belief in English invincibility – 'il leur est avis que il ne poeent perdre'.[21] Shortly after Crecy some clerical writer composed a poem of anti-French vitriol as exemplific of intense nationalism as anything a later age can manage. It survives in three manuscripts. French and English are contrasted thus:

> Francia, foeminea, pharisaea, vigoris idea
> Lynxea, viperea, vulpina, lupina, Medea . . .
> Anglia regna, mundi rosa, flos sine spina
> Mel sine sentina, vicisti bella marina.[22]

The author loaded France with every nasty adjective he could think of, while adorning England with similes of beauty.

The archers who won the battles were not, of course, the same people who represented their shires and boroughs in parliament: Chaucer's Yeoman did the one, his Frankeleyn the other. But each was necessary for the confident horizontality of achievement which constituted the nation's public experience. From our point of view the precise powers of fourteenth-century parliaments matter less than the fact of their frequency. In a general way the calling of parliament already represented recognition that royal government needed to be

national government, that laws and taxes would not function without assent, that the underlying principles of the Great Charter had regularly to be reaffirmed.

It is not fanciful to locate Magna Carta near the heart of the political development of England as a mature nation-state. Consider the comments of Bishop Stubbs that 'The Great Charter is the first great public act of the nation, after it has realised its own identity', and that 'the English nation had reached that point of conscious unity and identity which made it necessary for it to act as a self-governing and political body, a self-reliant and self-sustained nation'.[23] This may be to use rather too mythological a language in regard to the Great Charter and it has been much criticised. Yet, in the words of Professor Holt, 'Stubbs nevertheless grasped the essentials.'[24] This is undeniably true in terms of both content and reception: in content because of its crucial stress on the rights of the non-baronial 'free man', something unparalleled in contemporary continental documents; in reception because the circumstances of Henry III's reign produced a repeated confirmation of the Charter and insistence on its annual reading in shire courts which came to endow it with a symbolic significance, almost as object of the kingdom's ultimate loyalty. In a very real way parliament grew naturally and inevitably out of the political ethos generated by the Charter, and when in the seventeenth century it appealed against the king to 'the most fundamental law of the kingdom'[25] it was doing little more than explicate in altered circumstances the underlying principle of the Great Charter, a principle which subordinated the monarchy to the nation and its legal structure. Basically that principle was common to both sides in the Civil War.[26] It was a national presupposition.

While the claim found in the fourteenth-century document entitled *Modus tenendi Parliamentum* that the Commons were the essential element of parliament because they alone 'stand for the Community'[27] may seem a little fanciful, the fact that such a claim could seriously be made in a document of the time is what really matters to us. But it was the sheer experience of very frequent parliaments for which commoners had to be chosen anew in shires and boroughs throughout the land from Newcastle-on-Tyne to Truro almost every year which seems so important in nation-building. There were 118 separate parliaments between 1307 and

1422.[28] If most were held in London, quite a few met elsewhere in places like York, Lincoln, Gloucester and Cambridge. The parliament of the fourteenth century could hardly have developed as it did except on the already well-established local foundation of shires and boroughs. One advance in nation-building prepared the way for another. In a typical parliament of the period the Commons included two knights from each of thirty-seven shires and two burghers from each of some seventy towns with four from London. While many of these men were returned a number of times, the majority were not. They included a number of rich and powerful people but most were very minor local worthies of no national importance. What mattered was the regular meeting together of chosen representatives from every community of any possible weight in the country. It was an on-going experience inherently constructive of a political nation and represents in terms of national government a very considerable advance in horizontalist and participatory terms on anything that went earlier.

This concentration on the later fourteenth century has been grounded on the conviction that it represents the very latest point at which it is plausible to claim that the English nation-state had gelled so decisively that no imaginable circumstance could later have diverted English society into some quite other form. This steady enhancement of national identity and nation-state institutions owed, however, very little to religion. It was a quietly secularising process which actually went parallel, not with any hostility to religion or to piety, but with a growing resentment towards its more powerful institutional forms. The early English nation owed a very great debt indeed to Catholic Christianity and the papacy in particular and it was for long almost over-deferentially grateful in return. On the one side, as we have seen, the church and leading churchmen did much to unite England and provide English people with a sense of their unity as a nation; indeed it was a Pope, Gregory I, who, we may claim with tongue just a little in cheek, invented not only the English nation but also its uniquely favoured status by declaring that Angles were Angels. A much later Pope, Hadrian IV, and the one Englishman ever to be Bishop of Rome, conveniently bestowed Ireland upon the King of England – or so it was claimed. Papal Bulls in the twelfth century were not insignificant things; whether or not the Bull *Laudabiliter* is genuine, Hadrian IV's encouragement to

Henry II to possess himself of Ireland is certainly historical, though he died years before Henry's invasion began. One can see why he encouraged him. The Church in England, reshaped by busy arch-bishops like Lanfranc and Theobald, was becoming a model of modern catholicism along the lines of high Gregorian principle. The Church in Ireland was certainly not. The establishment of English rule in Ireland must have seemed the quickest way of bringing an area of rather backward religion into the full blaze of Roman Christianity. As Professor Davies remarked in the Wiles Lectures eight years ago, the conquerors were anxious 'to explain and justify their activities, in part at least, as a campaign of ecclesiastical reform and spiritual regeneration'.[29] Gerald of Wales rather let the cat out of the bag when, in comment on the Synod of Cashel of 1172, he remarked that 'in all parts of the Irish Church all matters . . . are to be conducted hereafter . . . in line with the observances of the English Church'.[30] Thus the early export of English nationalism could like its origin still be linked with, and benefit from, the very *romanitas* which it would later repudiate so emphatically.

Church support for the nation had, on the other hand, for centuries been balanced by its restraining insertion of the nation within a wider moral community. At Canterbury Greek archbishops like Theodore, Italian archbishops like Anselm, Norman archbishops like Theobald, even mere English archbishops like Langton or Winchelsey, were anything but nationalists. On the contrary their principal role was much more to internationalise a narrow church both spiritually and institutionally. Authority within the church of such men could never be seen as a merely national one. For them national sovereignty, or whatever phrase you choose, must have its limits, and tension between the national and the international was already present. We see it, for instance, in Bishop Grosseteste's attempt to get English common law brought into line with canon law over the matter of legitimacy and the famous reply of the barons at Merton in 1236, 'Nolimus leges Angliae mutare'. Until the close of the thirteenth century church leadership had stood for the restraint of the national principle quite as much as for its enlargement.

From then on the role of religion changed and its independence declined. Boniface of Savoy, who died in 1270, was the last foreign archbishop. Hostility to foreigners was growing. The Jews were expelled twenty years later. The rise of nationalism went with a decline in wider loyalties and tolerances. Moreover, from then on nearly all senior bishops were men who had made their careers in the echelons of the burgeoning royal administration and they remained uncreatively absorbed within the national political system, the validator of national wars. At its heart the growth of late medieval nationalism within a society where everyone was a Catholic could owe little to religion until that religion itself came under renewed scrutiny, a scrutiny that the very rise of the nation-state would eventually require.

When Henry VIII sealed this development by formally asserting in the Act of Restraint of Appeals of 1533 that 'This Realm of England is an Empire and so have been accepted in the world' governed by one sovereign in matters both spiritual and temporal, only a handful of people had retained the conviction or clarity of mind to stand against the triumph of the nation-state over the church which had fostered it. Thomas More, lawyer, civil servant and philosopher, went to his death precisely because he could not accept the unlimited claims of national identity: England cannot legislate against the world – 'For this one kingdom I have all other Christian realms.'[31] Western medieval Christendom had both encouraged the nation and restrained it. From now on, for England at least, the national principle alone would reign supreme.

This forced march through eight centuries of English history from Bede to Henry VIII has had a range of purposes. First, it has sought to summarise the case study of a particular medieval nation and nation-state – in fact by far the best example that we have – to demonstrate that the modernist claim, to quote Hobsbawm, that it is 'pointless' to use such terms except in regard to an 'historically recent period' simply will not do. Moreover the history of English national consciousness down the centuries is so valuable for nationalist study generally just because it is so extended, the material available for its analysis is so vast, and one can in consequence distinguish phases and factors in a way far harder to do with shorter timescales. It is, I have been trying to demonstrate, a many-layered reality, growing in depth and extent in time yet capable of significant setbacks too as well as of alterations in direction, something in which the Bible, ecclesiastical organisers and early historians, vernacular literature, myths of origin, early names for territories, shires (and the jury system as well), parliamentary elections and attendance, wars and weapons all have to

find a place. Secondly, it is only within a context where one is aware of such things as long bows and the election of knights of the shire to parliament that one can evaluate with realism any specifically religious factor. Thirdly, there is a danger at present among those who have rejected the shallowness of the full modernist thesis that they all the same refuse to go back beyond the watershed of the sixteenth century. We have noted it already in Greenfeld. One can see the same in Anthony Smith, a modernist whose consideration of ethnicity has forced him to abandon the full orthodoxy of late eighteenth century origins but who refuses quite to grasp the nettle of medieval nations. Thus he has very recently written that 'It is only from the late fifteenth century that we can confidently speak of a growing sense of English national identity, in a wider national state.'[32] There is in fact absolutely no reason to single out the late fifteenth century as crucial for a 'growing sense of English national identity'. Quite the contrary. A period of civil war and its aftermath and few parliaments, it has little special claim to any major notice in a history of the nation and its nationalism, any more than Greenfeld's equally arbitrary selection of the first third of the sixteenth century.[33]

I would like nevertheless to take one fairly early fifteenth century text to illustrate the character of medieval English nationalism, particularly because it suggests such close continuity with the post-Reformation form. It is entitled 'The Libel of English Policy', was written in 1436–7, probably in the Cotswolds, and presents a striking impression of economic nationalism: the nation of shopkeepers seems already upon us. Dick Whittington is its hero –

> . . . penne and papere may not me suffice
> Him to describe, so high he was of prise.[34]

The writer is concerned principally with control of the sea, especially the Dover–Calais crossing, and he is decidedly irritated by what he sees as unfair foreign competition. After describing at length the content of international trade and the chief nations England trades with, he focuses his worries upon Ireland. It is a fine country, productive of hides, fish and woollen and linen cloth. Moreover, Waterford has an excellent harbour and the land as a whole could produce a good deal more. Alas, however, its inhabitants are extremely unsatisfactory: 'the wylde Yrishe', he always calls them. Ireland is by rights an English possession but control is being sadly

lost. If things go on as at present, they could soon have a king of their own. The English have already been pushed into 'a lytelle cornere'. The result of a complete loss of Ireland could, in the author's eyes, be positively catastrophic:

> . . . if it be loste, as Christe Jhesu forbede,
> Ffarewelle Wales, than Englond cometh to drede
> Ffor alliaunce of Scotelonde and of Spayne.[35]

Here are the concerns of late sixteenth-century English nationalism clearly present in the first half of the fifteenth. English security and trade require the control of Wales and Ireland. Scotland is seen as a natural ally of continental enemies ready to pounce. All we can rely upon is divine help and naval supremacy. It is important to recognise that attitudes of this sort were not simply the product of the post-Reformation situation but were already present a hundred years earlier, even if Protestant–Catholic conflict could greatly exacerbate them. The grounding of late medieval English nationalism lay in economics, geo-political facts, the maintenance of power both at sea and over England's first empire – its Gaelic neighbours. All this precedes the sixteenth century.

Nevertheless the Reformation brought an undeniable change in intensity through a series of events beginning with Henry's well-orchestrated but thoroughly secularising anti-Roman assertion of absolute sovereignty in the 1530s, the subsequent swing to state Protestantism, Mary's brief but bloody persecution and the threat of conquest from Philip of Spain, Mary's erstwhile husband. There was nothing inherently nationalist about Protestantism. The linkage was largely fortuitous. The excommunication of Elizabeth by Pope Pius V in 1570, the Massacre of St Bartholomew two years later, the Armada, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* and Gunpowder Plot combined to heat up English nationalism from the middle of Elizabeth's reign while reshaping it as a thoroughly militant and Protestant force determined to take on the Spanish threat not only in the Straits of Dover but in the Netherlands, Ireland and the New World. When the danger from Spain receded, that from France replaced it and the liberation struggle – as English people saw it – against foreign political and religious tyranny went on. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the arrival of thousands of Huguenot refugees in England, the Trial of the Seven Bishops and the whole Catholicising policy of

James II, the wars with Louis XIV and the exiled Stuart court set up in Paris itself, all ensured that a great fear of Catholicism would continue to dominate English consciousness for a century and a half, until well after the 'Protestant Succession' was firmly established in the eighteenth century. In the course of this long period, Ireland would be settled and devastated, America colonised, England itself for a time wholly disrupted. The Protestant nationalism which unifies this whole sequence of events would become, partially tamed and secularised, the British Protestant nationalism of the eighteenth century which Linda Colley has described so persuasively. To this vast development we have now to turn.

Even Hobsbawm reluctantly admitted that in Tudor England we have to recognise a case of proto-nationalism or even 'something close to modern patriotism' though he added that while 'it would be pedantic to refuse this label to Shakespeare's propagandist plays about English history . . . we are not entitled to assume that the ground-lings read into them what we do'.[36] Whyever not? The nationalist message of Shakespeare's histories from *Richard II* to *Henry V* is anything but obscure and they were all written within ten years of the defeat of the Armada, when the sense of national struggle against the greatest power of the age was at its height. What is noteworthy in the Shakespearean histories, as also in a poem like Michael Drayton's *Agincourt*, is both what is there and what is not. Shake-speare revels in the history of what we have already seen as a major nationalist period – the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century – as evidence of England's uniqueness from John of Gaunt's dying speech in *Richard II* to Henry V's near miraculous victory at Agincourt. But what is most striking in the more mature plays – *Henry IV* and *Henry V* – is his preoccupation with the common man: Falstaff, Bardolph, Judge Shallow, John Bates, Michael Williams and the rest. The Englishness which Shakespeare and Drayton celebrate is that of 'true English hearts stuck close together' in Drayton's words, or Shakespeare's 'on one pair of English legs did march three Frenchmen',[37] the superiority of a nation of commoners over an army of feudal lords and peasants. Nothing is more significant than the contrast implied between French anxiety lest, even in death, 'our vulgar drench their peasant limbs in blood of princes'[38] and the comradeship between the English king and his largely plebeian army. Here again a suggestion of horizontality predominates.

To deny the nationalism of Gaunt's 'This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England', or Henry V's speech, 'On, on, you noblest English'[39] before the walls of Harfleur would seem as absurd as to deny the nationalism of the poem of Henley with which we began. But what throughout is absent in Shakespeare is the slightest hint of a nationalism Protestantly inclined. Of course, one may answer that this really would be too anachronistic in plays set in the early fifteenth century, though if Shakespeare had a mind to do so he could well have brought Wyclif or some later Lollard in to provide an additional theme. Even the final history, *Henry VIII*, written many years later, has an ambiguous note to it. It does end prophetically with the baptism of 'the high and mighty princess of England, Elizabeth' and yet it is striking how the play's tragic heroine is undoubtedly the rejected Catherine, seen at the end of her life with the Spanish Ambassador. Shakespeare is reasonably credited with being at least a little of a recusant. Whatever the reason, it is not with him but with Milton that the full force of the new form of England's nationalism appears.

Several years before Shakespeare penned Gaunt's 'This England', John Lyly had already expressed what was to become a common-place of the next century, 'So tender a care hath he alwaies had of that England, as of a new Israel, his chosen and peculier people.'[40] So Milton sixty years later: 'The favour and the love of heaven, we have great argument to think in a peculiar manner propitious and propending towards us. Why else was this Nation chosen before any other, that out of her as out of Sion should be proclaim'd and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation?'[41] Milton had Wyclif in mind. 'Peculiar', a word that frequently recurs in such contexts, is biblically orientated, identifying the English by its very usage with God's 'peculiar people' of 1 Peter 2.9.

Every year after 1605, 5 November was the nearest thing England ever had to a national day in which the preservation of parliament was recalled, effigies of the Pope and Guy Fawkes burned in the bonfires of popular liturgy. Burning an effigy of the Pope was not a piece of naughty fun but the fiercest rejection possible of what was widely seen as Anti-Christ, someone directly and personally respon-sible for every crime against Protestants from St Bartholomew's Massacre to the Gunpowder Plot. 'This bloudye monster of Rome', wrote Francis Hastings in 1598 in his *Watchword to all religious and*

true-hearted Englishmen, 'doth not stay here, but having alreadie stirred up Spaine to set upon us both in Ireland, and in England, doth still whet them on by his unholy provocations, to invade.'[42] Remember too the special prayers recalling God's 'marvellous loving kindness to our Church and Nation': 'Be thou still our mighty Protectour, and scatter our enemies that delight in blood. Infatuate and defeat their Counsels, abate their Pride, asswage their Malice and confound their Devices . . . ' Which brings us back to the Book of Common Prayer and the vernacular Bible. The impact of the two books on the intensification and re-formation of English consciousness cannot be overemphasised. Over one hundred editions of the Bible in English between 1560 and 1611 and no fewer than 140 of the Authorised Version between then and 1640 make it absolutely clear that it was reaching very far indeed into the community, but it was the compulsory weekly attendance at the parish church to hear the services of the Prayer Book which ensured that almost everyone was permeated both ideologically and linguistically with Bible and Prayer Book religion. The very 'Catholic' shape of Anglican services with their repetition of finely expressed formal prayer rather than sermons and informal rantings ensured the breadth and depth of their impact, unachievable by either the Latin services of Roman Catholicism or the less structured services of pure Protestantism. Nevertheless the formal sermons laid down in *The Book of Homilies* included a certain amount of anti-Catholicism which also had its effect. The very real and prolonged threat from overseas, its express linkage with religion and the sheer success of England in providentially warding off attack from apparently far greater powers provided the ideal context for a nationalist biblical interpretation which did not require the undergirding of any special theology.

To Bible and Prayer Book were, moreover, joined two other classics for the construction of a history of Christian nationalism. The first was Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.[43] Its enlarged edition of 1570, the year of the Queen's excommunication, was ordered to be set along with the Bible in all churches. It was second only to the Bible in the number of copies printed to the end of the seventeenth century and it continued to be frequently reprinted often in cheap instalments to enable the poor to buy it, through the eighteenth century. Thus, the *Book of Martyrs* could be treated as a sort of additional biblical testament. It provided a complete history of the church in England, an account of struggles against the papacy of medieval kings, of Wyclif and of national liberation achieved under Henry VIII. The seven hundred pages devoted to the Marian martyrs were thus firmly placed within a national Christian history, a sort of English Book of Maccabees, and later editions carried on the story to the Armada and beyond. Foxe's martyrs were very ordinary people, men and women; the book was graphically illustrated and there was considerable stress upon Queen Mary being the wife of Philip of Spain. The dedication to Elizabeth likened her to Constantine and the book as a whole became for generations of ordinary Englishmen their national history *par excellence*, an explanation as to why they were indeed a 'peculiar' people set apart for divine purposes. To Foxe we may add Hakluyt, whose *Principal Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation* was first published in 1589 and included, of course, 'the memorable defeat of the Spanish huge Armada'. Further enlarged editions followed. Froude described the *Principal Navigations* as 'the prose epic of the modern English nation' and G.M. Trevelyan called Hakluyt the 'most influential writer in the age of Shakespeare, if it was not Foxe'.

The internal construction of the Protestant nationalism which came to dominate English history for a highly decisive century and a half when England moved from being a small nation-state to being a highly successful, aggressive, imperialist power is clear enough. But it needs to be stressed once more that this was a redirection in a situation providing heightened consciousness of something which had long existed, and it was a redirection which took time to be assimilated by the nation at large. Even the sense of England as a chosen nation with a providential role can be found in sixteenth-century Catholics like Cardinal Pole as well as Protestants like Foxe and it goes back, at least implicitly, to pre-Norman times. If Shakespeare and Drayton were appealing in post-Armada days to the nationalist epics of the later Middle Ages, Archbishop Parker was at the same time appealing to a still earlier phase in English nation-building when he printed the Anglo-Saxon gospels (1571) and made an appeal to old English tradition a major element in the Anglican case in his *De Antiquitate Britannicae Ecclesiae* (1572). It was because the English nation-state, its history, structures and self-consciousness had been so long and so firmly in place that they could both be used extremely aggressively by Protestant propagandists and proto-imper-

ial apologists on the one side and be taken for granted by people with very different stances. The virulence of Protestant nationalism should not deceive one into thinking it affected everyone or in the same way. Probably only a small minority were infected with it as decisively shaping their outlook in the age of Shakespeare. One may call that minority Puritan. A century later, Puritan theology had been watered down but the sense of a Protestant national identity had taken root in the vast majority of Englishmen.

The obvious exception is that of English Catholics. However much they were denounced as crypto-traitors, most Catholics were not the less patriotically nationalist. They would again and again feel themselves forced to be 'Englishmen in vaine'[44] but almost ostentatiously English for all that. They could do so without difficulty precisely because English nationhood preceded the Reformation. A very different example is that of seventeenth-century radicals of various sorts, both religious and secularising, such as the people who surfaced so vividly in the Putney debates of 1647. We should not forget in this regard the huge outpouring of newspapers and pamphlets in the 1640s. The year 1645 saw no fewer than 722 different cheap newspapers representing more than every conceivable viewpoint. For no year between 1643 and 1649 did the number fall below 400. In the same years more than a thousand pamphlets were published annually.[45] Here, if anywhere, is a case of the intensification of national consciousness through the printed page. Much of it was intensely Protestant but it was of its nature also highly horizontalist, and productive of a much enlarged political nation. Colonel Rainborough's famous words at Putney, 'The poorest he that is in England has a life to live as the greatest he', were not so much more than a contemporary application of the principles of Magna Carta, especially clause 39, 'nullus liber homo capiatur, vel imprisonetur . . . nisi per legale judicium parium suorum vel per legem terrae'. What was new was to find it so clearly required by the Bible: 'I do not find anything in the law of God', remarked Rainborough, 'that a lord shall choose twenty burgesses and a gentleman but two, or a poor man shall choose none.'[46] Frequent Leveller talk of 'England' and 'the free-born Englishman', however seemingly impractical in its applications, was fiercely horizontalist and nation-conscious. It was biblically-based yet, curiously, it proved also distinctly secularising.

The really important point about English nationalism regarded internally is that it encompassed just about everyone. The celebration of English national excellence was common to both sides in the struggles of the seventeenth century.[47] If Milton and the radicals saw the political implications of England's peculiar election one way, Tories saw it another. Edward Chamberlayne wrote a kind of guidebook to England in 1669, 'a necessary book for all Englishmen at all times'. For Chamberlayne, England 'excels all other nations' in almost every imaginable way – even if, he admits, the enemy had sowed a few tares of late. Even 'good nature' he could claim is 'a thing so peculiar to the English nation and so appropriated by Almighty God to them . . . that it cannot be well translated into any other language'.[48] But it was Defoe who may express best the mature essence of English nationhood as it moved into the eighteenth century and not just because of his satirical poem *The True-Born Englishman* of 1701. As a dissenter in politics, a prolific journalist, a common man, the son of a butcher and himself a hosier as well as author of *A General History of Trade*, he represented the inherently secularising process within the English nationalist drift, the prophet of the trend to become a nation of shopkeepers. His very mockery of the Englishman as a 'heterogeneous thing', a mix of numerous ethnicities, was possible just because he and his society were in fact so confident in their national self-identity.

But by the time Defoe died in 1731, was it still an English identity or a British one? We have now to face the Colley thesis. The impact of Linda Colley's *Britons, Forging the Nation 1707–1837* has been a very considerable one, almost acceptable even to modernists because it still seems to retain nation construction within their orthodox eighteenth-century parameters. Of course, that was not her intention and she recognises explicitly that the British nationalism whose construction she demonstrates with such detailed evidence for the eighteenth century was indeed the revamping of a much older English one. 'The invention of Britishness', she has no doubt, was 'closely bound up with Protestantism, with war with France and with the acquisition of empire.'[49] The need to plug Britishness was obvious enough after the 1707 Union with Scotland. Englishmen expected the Welsh to see themselves as really just part of the English but, in theory, the Scots could not be made to do the same. There had to be some give and take and an official substitution of 'British'

for 'English' was an important part of it. *Rule Britannia*, written by a Lowland Scot in 1740, proclaimed the new identity. In official vocabulary 'English' and 'England' were regularly being replaced by 'British' and 'Britain' by the 1750s. Isaac Watts had already produced a translation of the Psalms in 1719 in which the word 'Israel' was regularly and ludicrously replaced by 'Great Britain', and forward-looking citizens debated about how best to express themselves so as not to give offence to other groups within the United Kingdom.

All that is well enough and it was particularly important for the Scots. Nevertheless there is a real danger of overdoing its significance so as, in modernist talk, to conclude misleadingly that Britain is an invented nation, not so much older than the United States. It would be far truer to say that it was a renamed nation and not so much renamed as all that. 'For many poorer and less literate Britons', writes Colley, 'Scotland, Wales and England remained more potent rallying calls than Great Britain, except in times of danger from abroad.'[50] It is the 'except' clause in that conclusion to which we have to take exception. 'Rule Britannia' is arousing enough but its flamboyant nationalism suggests a certain artificiality reflective of something not quite believed. Yet the occasional use of the word 'Britannia' was not new in the eighteenth century. English people always liked to play on the Greater Britain theme when it suited them. Bede began the practice and Saxon kings had regularly continued it. From the time of Geoffrey of Monmouth, King Arthur had been medieval England's hero. When a troublesome Frenchman at the Council of Constance in 1417 argued that the Welsh should vote separately from the English because they were a distinct 'nation' ('natio particularis'), the English replied that Wales, both spiritually and politically, was simply part of the 'natio Anglicana alias Brytannica'.[51] Camden's *Britannia* was first published well before James VI became James I, and the female figure of Britannia began to appear on the English coinage in Charles II's reign, well before the Union. Even the verbal use of 'Britain' was, then, as much a piece of traditional English mythology and expansionism as any deference to a new post-Union nation. But the fact remains that 'in times of danger', when a 'rallying call' was really needed, it was 'England' not 'Britain' that was used. What did Nelson say at the crucial moment in the war with Napoleon? 'England expects that every man will do his duty.'[52] Or the Prime Minister, William Pitt, confirming that the decisive

battle had indeed been won? 'England has saved herself by her exertions and will, as I trust, save Europe by her example.'[53] Not much sign there of referring to Britain in times of danger. But the verbal dominance of England over Britain remained a striking characteristic of the nineteenth century. Even David Livingstone, that most Scottish of missionaries, was subject to it. After sixteen years in Africa, when he returns to this country, it is 'dear old England' he speaks of, glad of 'so hearty an English welcome'.[54] The emotional supremacy of England is no less clear in the poets, whether it be Blake, Browning or Keats: 'Oh to be in England'; 'Happy is England! I could be content to see no other verdure than its own'; 'Till we have built Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land'.

I do not think that the Colley thesis adequately respects the continued emotional, intellectual and political dominance of the concept of England over that of Britain. If in 1870 Newman could find it natural to write 'Englishmen feel that war might break out between England and France any day'[55] he was only expressing himself in the way that anyone would. The political nation he felt he belonged to was English. And how could anyone easily have felt otherwise when the history of their nation was so overwhelmingly and explicitly formulated in terms of the 'History of England' from Macaulay, Gardiner, Green and Lecky in the nineteenth century to Trevelyan, the Oxford History of England and so much else in the twentieth. As David Cannadine has commented, 'The word Britain did not appear in the title of any of the series that have been mentioned. These years may have witnessed the zenith of the British nation-state . . . but the nation whose history they recounted and whose identity they helped to proclaim was England.'[56] The word which most needs stressing in that quotation is 'may'. But it is in Kipling that the primacy of England over Britain remains most striking, just because here at the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century we are at the heart of the poetry of British overseas imperialism at its 'zenith'. It is true that Kipling occasionally speaks of Britain and the British, as in the poem *The Young British Soldier*, but what comes naturally to him is, undoubtedly, England and the English: 'For Allah created the English mad – the maddest of all mankind'; 'O thirty million English that babble of England's might'; 'Troopin', troopin', give another cheer – 'Ere's to English

women an' a quart of English beer.' In lines like these, English nationalism turned imperialist, self-critical yet infinitely self-assured, is creatively re-imagined and demonstrated simultaneously to be alive and well.

Great Britain, Colley concludes, 'as it emerged in the years between the Act of Union and the accession of Queen Victoria . . . must be seen both as one relatively new nation and as three much older nations'[57] with a frequently changing, indeed uncertain, relationship between the two. Whether the Welsh can quite be called an 'old nation' or a nation at all we will discuss in chapter 3; and then, don't forget, by the accession of Queen Victoria there had been a further Act of Union and the Irish were within Great Britain too, which further complicates the issue as to whether it could possibly be called 'one relatively new nation' in 1837. 'Identities', Colley quite rightly insists, 'are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time.'[58] I suspect that for most English people throughout this period 'English' and 'British' were hardly two identities; 'British' was merely an additional name for a single identity. For the Scots and the Welsh, on the other hand, they were indeed two different, but not opposed, realities. For the Welsh who had long if unenthusiastically accepted that they were in a way part of England, the new stress on Britain could only be welcome. They, after all, remained the lineal representatives of the Britain of the past. For them the resurrection of the term in common currency could actually also help resurrect Welshness as a fully respectable identity and make it possible to contrast it with Englishness without appearing disloyal. For the Scots the formal recognition of Britain was really a condition for the Union. While their internal institutional differences – ecclesiastical, legal and educational – were guaranteed, the advantages of being British as well were manifest – both parliamentary representation at Westminster and the chance to be a partner in a rapidly expanding empire. Between 1760 and 1820 some two hundred Scots were elected for seats outside their own country while the new commercial wealth of Glasgow would be unimaginable outside the imperial context. To Scots Britishness mattered more in practice than to anyone else, as providing profitable membership of what could for them be conceived as genuinely a new nation, but it was clearly additional to the national identity they already possessed. For most Irish, the United Kingdom's fourth

people in 1837, Britishness was far more problematic, involving a sense of not only distinct, but almost incompatible, realities, but to that we will return.

One reason why I say 'almost' and not necessarily quite 'incompatible' realities was that the anti-Catholicism within Britishness was rapidly declining by the time of the Union in 1800. There was no longer a point to it. In 1707, as Colley rightly stresses, Britishness seemed almost intrinsically bound up with Protestantism. Wales and Scotland could go along so easily with English nationalism because they shared a Protestant consciousness and, at the lay and popular level, there seemed very little religious difference between the three. Faced with the armies of Louis XIV and a Stuart Catholic court in Paris, one could hardly lower one's anti-Catholic guard. But a century later, any threat from Catholicism had wholly disappeared. English Catholics survived as a powerless little group, Ireland seemed pretty safely in Protestant hands but the overseas enemy, if still France, was no longer Catholic France. The anti-Catholicism of the Revolution made Catholicism more acceptable this side of the Channel. There was no problem in Catholic institutions, housed for two centuries on the continent, moving quietly back to England. Still more important, a great empire could not afford to be too discriminating in matters of religion. Ireland was no longer the only place where the crown had numerous Catholic subjects. The Quebec Act of 1774 was probably the deciding moment when British nationalism, turning imperialist, recognised that an overt anti-Catholicism was better abandoned. The decision to guarantee the rights of the church in Quebec did in fact upset plenty of people whose minds were still set in the Protestant nationalist mould of an earlier age both in Britain and in America. But there could be no turning back, especially when Malta and Trinidad were added to the empire. The rather raucous Protestantism of the Irish Ascendancy would from then on be increasingly irritating to policy-makers in London. Of course, popular anti-Catholicism survived in England throughout the nineteenth century, despite the Emancipation of 1829.[59] Britain remained in many ways both a Protestant state and a Protestant society, but its relationship to Catholicism from now on was a more ambiguous one. English nationalism had been determinedly Protestant for a century and a half. British nationalism was essentially secular.