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1 British Perceptions

The British interests of the Stuart monarchy and those of the three kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland diverged markedly in the mid-seventeenth century. In determining if there was a British revolution between 1629 and 1660, governmental, ideological and confessional upheavals are key elements; so is the threat, if not the accomplishment, of social reconstruction. But contemporaneous perceptions of both Britain and revolutionary change have also to be taken into account, particularly when these perceptions were reinforced by providential and prophetic interpretations of events. There is also a need to reconnect public policy with political thought. Integral to this process is an awareness of the rival formulations of Britain and the British Isles as perceived in England, Scotland and Ireland. These processes, which clashed awkwardly and at times bloodily between 1629 and 1660, can be categorised as the Britannic, the Scottish, the Irish and the Gothic. In varying degrees, the first three represent inclusive British perceptions that can be deemed respectively the imperial, the confederal and the associate. The last, based on the supremacy of the English parliament and the common law, was an exclusive perception that proved least accommodating to the others.¹

The Britannic

The Britannic formulation, which was essentially imperial, was rooted in the determination of James VI of Scotland to project himself as James I of Great Britain and Ireland. Rather than retain the Scottish Stewart as the founding surname of the first encompassing British dynasty, he took over the Francophile adaptation of Stuart patented by his mother, Mary, Queen of Scots. His first issue of coinage proclaimed him as Emperor of Great Britain. Non-anglocentric sensibilities were partially accommodated on the flags, seals and emblems projecting the Stuarts as an imperial British dynasty, not just as rulers of multiple kingdoms. Thus, the maps drawn by John Speed from

1611 were embossed with a composite imperial emblem representing the three kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland as well as the Stuart's inherited English claim on France. The royal standard featured three English lions set against three French lilies on both the top left and bottom right quarterings; the lion rampart of Scotland was placed on the top right and the Irish harp on the bottom left.² This Britannic resolve of James I had firm intellectual roots in his ancient and native kingdom, not least because tangible British harmony enabled the Scots to counter traditional English claims to suzerainty. Indeed, aspirations for union, which were given a particular fillip by the Protestant Reformation in both Scotland and England, had a long pedigree founded on the concept of empire that had exclusive sovereignty within the British Isles.³ At the same time, traditional English dominance of the three kingdoms, characterised by the interchanging of Britain for England, was a contemporaneous historiographic problem rooted in medieval myth refocused by Renaissance scholarship.

The anglocentric dominance of British history rested on Norman–Welsh myth making of the twelfth century, most notably the fabrications of Giraldus Cambrensis and Geoffrey of Monmouth. The Britannic construct was derived from Brut, the epic Trojan hero who moved to Rome before progressing through Gaul, from where he and his followers settled the whole of the British Isles. Although Britain was divided up among the successors of Brut during the first millennium BC, anglocentric dominance was reasserted under Roman occupation. Constantine the Great, who spread Christianity throughout the Roman Empire and transferred the capital from Rome to Byzantium at the outset of the fourth century AD, was both born and acclaimed emperor in Britain. Following the fall of Rome, the Britons were subject to invasions from Picts, Scots and Saxons that forced them to the margins in Wales and Cornwall. However, King Arthur had led a British revival in the early sixth century, which expanded his dominion throughout the British Isles and into France. Successive conquests by Saxons, Danes and Norsemen tied epic British heroism to the march of civility as institutionalised through kingship, the common law and post-Reformation Protestantism. This mythical Britannic perception was reinforced by Welsh antiquarians, keen to identify Wales as the enduring heartland of the original Britons, as well as by English chroniclers like Raphael Holinshed and mercantile adventurers like John Dee during the sixteenth century. The formulation of a territorially expansive Britain was rationalised by the

antiquarian William Camden, in his final version of *Britannia* prepared in 1607.⁴

Although Camden regarded the figure of Brut as mythic and without scholarly credibility, his humanistic conception of Britain underwrote English claims to be an exclusive empire. For the English were an elect Protestant nation with a Christian tradition under an episcopacy unbounden to Rome but deemed erastian through its close ties to the monarchy and the state. Conquest and invasion had refined their civilising mission. Thus, London, the old Roman foundation, was now the metropolitan capital of a composite British empire whose territories encompassed the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy (the ancient division of seven regional kingdoms) as well as Wales and Cornwall. This composite empire could not only lay claim to Ireland but also to that part of Scotland formerly held by the Picts. Though barbarians, they were not like the Irish and Scots of irredeemable Gothic stock, but actually Britons who had lived outside the boundaries of Roman civilisation – the classical demarcation which ensured that such redeemable Gothic influences as the Saxons, the Danes and the Norsemen had enriched rather than destroyed Britain. These northern boundaries, which were settled at the Forth–Clyde division of Scotland, conformed to the division between the ancient Scottish kingdom of Alba and the Saxon kingdom of Northumbria. Following his accession to the English throne, the founder of the Stuart dynasty certainly felt his imperial vanity was enhanced by the notion that he was the fabled heir to both Constantine the Great and King Arthur as well as the more prosaic Tudors. At the same time, the repeated print runs of Camden's *Britannia* throughout the seventeenth century fuelled rather than dispelled English claims to superiority over Scotland and Ireland as well as Wales.⁵

That the three kingdoms actually constituted an imperial composite was illustrated graphically by the cartographer John Speed, whose *Theatre of the British Empire*, first published in 1611, remained the template for the subsequent mapping of Great Britain and Ireland for much of the seventeenth century. Following Camden, England was depicted as a composite kingdom based on the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy. Scotland was also a composite of the Scots, the Picts and the Isles; Ireland of its four provinces of Munster, Leinster, Connacht and Ulster together with Meath; and even Wales had a tripartite division of North, South and Powys. Abridged versions of Speed's maps issued from 1632, though purportedly depicting England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland as multiple kingdoms, still adhered to the basic structure of a composite

empire.⁶ This composite, Britannic representation of Camden and Speed, which effectively appended Scotland, Ireland and the rest of the British Isles onto detailed topographical descriptions of the English and Welsh shires, was accorded international recognition by the leading Dutch cartographer, Wilhelm Blaeu. His map of *Britannia* was published posthumously in 1645.⁷ In like manner, when the work of the earlier great Dutch cartographer Gerard Mercator was ‘Englished’ in 1635, his map of England, Scotland and Ireland first published in 1595 was re-titled the Isles of Britain. In this work, dedicated to the ‘Gentrie of Great Brittain’, the commonwealth of Scotland was second only to the English in terms of greatness, while Ireland remained a dependent kingdom whose development was restricted by the limited advance of civilisation beyond the English Pale.⁸

In representing a male Britannia as barbarous but noble, then refined by Saxons, Danes and Normans in the guise of classical heroes, Speed was illustrating the importance of progressive civility to the Stuart dynasty’s imperial project. Indeed, the association of nobility with British patriotism as a heroic activity was a noted feature of artistic endorsement for early Stuart imperialism, as is evident from the masques of Ben Jonson and Thomas Carew, from the portraiture of Sir Anthony van Dyke, and from the set designs and commemorative architecture of Inigo Jones. Such classically inspired representations of imperial monarchy were by no means incompatible with the prevailing chivalric codes of honour sustained and refashioned at the polycentric courts of James I and his son, Charles I.⁹ The influx of classical ideas on civic responsibilities and duties, particularly the virtues of public service allied to private scholarship, derived primarily from the revived interest in such Stoics as Cicero, Tacitus and Seneca. Received humanist teachings on the public good and the place of direct action had shaped the historical thinking of Camden and his associates, who included such antiquarians as the librarian and intellectual facilitator Sir Robert Cotton and artistic disciples such as Jonson. Neo-stoicism, as it had emerged in France and the Netherlands in response to the political polarisation and confessional intensity of the Wars of Religion in the sixteenth century, offered a more reflective moral perspective than the hitherto prevailing pragmatism in state affairs attributed primarily to the writings of Machiavelli.¹⁰

For Camden and his associates, the admonitions by Tacitus against corruption and duplicity at the centre of power inspired their neo-stoic commitment to a Stuart Britain intent on the fundamental religious and

ethical reform of a body politic that had become jaded and corrupted in the later years of Elizabethan England. Their intention was not to alter the constitution, but to inspire good governance in the interests of moderation, harmony and equilibrium: that is, to uphold monarchical government but not arbitrary rule. So long as the body politic was not degenerately or irredeemably corrupted, literary and artistic criticism sustained the moral virtue of the Britannic perspective. This supportive view was carried not just to the English provinces, but throughout the British dominions by courtiers, their retainers and clients. At the same time, newsletters and transcripts in manuscript carried copy of court and other current affairs which circumvented restrictions on the printing of domestic news that was tightly controlled by the privy or governing councils in all three kingdoms prior to the 1640s.¹¹ In practical terms, the neo-stoic stance can be identified with apprehensions about the harmful impact of Spanish infiltration at the Stuart courts and, after the outbreak of the Thirty Years War in 1618, with the vigorous defence of Protestantism in continental Europe. However, neo-stoicism was not necessarily about political reform from within. Indeed, the teaching of Seneca favoured withdrawal from the corruptions of public life in favour of private scholarly and aesthetic pursuits, a teaching which encouraged passive obedience towards imperial monarchy.¹²

Perhaps one of the foremost British examples of this passive stance was the Scottish intellectual Sir William Drummond of Hawthornden, an irenicist or proponent of peaceful accommodations who used history didactically to avoid confrontation with the Stuart monarchy. He prepared his memorials of state affairs under the five successive Stewart kings called James from 1423 to 1540 to serve as a warning to Charles I against taking discriminatory action against disaffected members of the Scottish nobility. In like manner, Sir Robert Cotton had written a history of the twelfth-century English king Henry III to attack the pernicious influence of royal favourites under James I. However, the literary output of Drummond of Hawthornden, like that of his close literary correspondent at court, Sir William Alexander of Menstrie (the future Earl of Stirling), used English, not Scots, as the complement to Latin in the pursuit of civility, a practice also followed by James I himself after 1603.¹³ Thus, the Authorised Version of the Bible produced under James's imprimatur in 1611 endorsed his imperial vision of godly monarchy and his resolve that English should be the prescribed language of Reformed civility throughout his British dominions.

As a firm advocate of the view that monarchy was divinely interposed between God and civil society, James I of Great Britain viewed dynastic consolidation as the first step towards perfect union under an imperial monarchy. Such a union opened up the prospect of British leadership in a Protestant Europe battling to resist Antichrist in the form of the papacy and the whole panoply of the Counter-Reformation. This imperial vision of godly monarchy, enunciated initially in *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies* (1597), was followed by *Basilikon Doron* (1599), essentially a manifesto for James's dynasty's divine right to succeed to the English throne. On the one hand, James drew demonstrably on traditional English claims to be an empire free from papal control. On the other hand, he rebutted Presbyterian claims to the autonomy of the Scottish Kirk, whereby government through bishops, the erastian preference of imperial monarchy, faced replacement by an autonomous hierarchy of ecclesiastical courts.¹⁴

Accordingly, while James I glorified in portraying himself as Constantine *redivivus*, his main preference was for biblical rather than classical analogies, and most notably for his idealisation as Great Britain's Solomon. This idealisation was solemnised by the sermon given at his state funeral on 7 May 1625 and was visually commemorated ten years later in the ceiling painting by the Flemish maestro Peter Paul Rubens that constituted the centrepiece of the Banqueting House in Whitehall designed by Inigo Jones. In this painting James, the imperial monarch, is attended by two female supplicants and a baby boy standing before his throne awaiting judgement, not in biblical terms of deciding maternity, but in celebrating his paternalistic creation of a new British child through his unification of Scotland and England.¹⁵

The Scottish

In effecting this union, James had also brought into play Scottish origin myths. Largely the product of the Wars of Independence of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, these Scottish myths borrowed heavily from Irish origin mythology, the first to be articulated within the multiple kingdoms from the eleventh century. In contrast to the Roman imperial element, which the English shared with other aggressive northern powers in early modern Europe, the Scottish myths stressed civic origins.¹⁶ Gathelus of Athens, having journeyed to Egypt, married Scota, daughter of the Pharaoh, shortly before Moses led the Israeli exodus. In

the wake of the Pharaoh's destruction in the Red Sea, Gathelus and Scota wandered to Iberia from whence their heirs moved to Ireland and then to Scotland, where an autonomous kingdom was established in 330 BC under Fergus son of Ferchar, a contemporary of Alexander the Great. Around AD 403, having overcome an alliance of Romans and Picts which temporarily forced their return to Ireland, Fergus son of Earc re-established the kingdom of the Scots, which was expanded under Kenneth MacAlpine in 843 to include that of the Picts. Despite continuing English hostility, their descendants went on to consolidate the borders of Scotland from the Solway to the Tweed in the eleventh century. This legend underwrote not only Scottish pretensions to the longest unbroken line of kings in Europe, but also the imperial aspirations of their Stewart monarchy. For Achaius, the 65th King of Scots, was leagued in friendship, not clientage, with Charlemagne, the Holy Roman Emperor, around 790, a league which laid the foundation of the 'auld alliance' between Scotland and France that was consolidated by the Wars of Independence. The advent of the Reformation gave added significance to the legend – for the spread of Christianity from the Scots to the Picts by Columba and his followers during the sixth century was viewed as proto-Presbyterianism untrammelled by either erastian episcopacy or Rome.

Fergus MacEarc, who actually ruled around AD 500, was the first authentic King of Scots. His designation as 40th in line from Fergus MacFerchar was a fabrication notably embellished by Hector Boece, first principal of King's College, Aberdeen, in his *Scotorum Historiae* of 1527, when Anglo-Scottish relations had degenerated in view of the real prospect of an English conquest of Scotland. Six years earlier, Boece's fellow countryman and Sorbonne scholar John Mair had proposed an alternative strategy offering permanent resolution for Anglo-Scottish conflict. His *Historia Maioris Britannia* discounted the mythical origins of both countries, rejected English claims to superiority, and distanced him from his country's xenophobia towards England. Mair was an eloquent advocate of British union through dynastic alliance such as that between James IV of Scotland and Margaret Tudor of England in 1503, an alliance that eventually brought their great-grandchild James VI to the English throne. James was notably indebted to Mair's imperial vision of a composite British empire. However, this vision requires wider international contextualising, especially as the Spanish monarchy had already established an Iberian world empire when the Stuart dynasty commenced its British project.¹⁷

Mair was the principal Iberian apologist within the three kingdoms. However, the main opponents of world empire within the three kingdoms were also Scots, especially John Knox from a biblical and apocalyptic perspective and George Buchanan, the foremost classical exponent of aristocratic republicanism. The Scottish formulation was anti-imperial but by no means antipathetic to a greater Britain. Both viewed post-Reformation Scotland as a virtuous commonwealth that should be open to wider federative arrangements to counter universal monarchy. Buchanan, though no less sceptical than Camden about mythic origins, had firmed up Boece's fabricated line of kings in order to demonstrate the capacity of the Scottish commonwealth to remove tyrannical monarchs. In marked contrast to Camden's imperial perception of continuity and stability through virtuous monarchy, Buchanan stressed that an elective monarchy had depended on the consent of the political community. This notion of popular sovereignty, basic to Buchanan's conception of civic humanism, had its roots in Cicero's questioning of the legitimacy of government. Buchanan's advocacy of the right of resistance to monarchy, which upheld trusteeship over sovereignty in *De Iure Regnis apud Scotos dialogus* (1579), made the book a ready target for proscription by successive Stuarts.¹⁸

The fundamental reconfiguration of Britain was also a prime concern of Andrew Melville, humanist, educational reformer and founder of Scottish Presbyterianism, as indeed it was of Edmund Spenser, whose perceptions of English rule in Ireland, however demonised by contemporary historicists, are only problematic if viewed in an insular context.¹⁹ Spenser, like Melville, viewed the constituent parts of the British Isles as distinctive but supportive elements in the great war against the Iberian world empire. It was Melville who first suggested that the imperial Britannic be moderated by the confederal Scottish perspective. In a pastoral eulogy on the birth of Prince Henry, eldest son of James VI, in 1594, he anticipated that the future regal union would join Scotland and England in a united commonwealth of the Scoto-Britannic people. This new commonwealth, however, would be but the first step in a grand confederation of free Protestant states.

David Hume of Godscroft, the leading Presbyterian intellectual in Jacobean Britain, was no less committed to the full integration of Britain. In 1605 he promoted the idea of a complete political and religious union that would lead to the fusion of the British peoples. Nonetheless, the creation of a universal British commonwealth under the Stuart dynasty to challenge Spain and the papacy sat awkwardly with the aristocratic

republic which he, like Buchanan, idealised. The Iberian menace pointed to new political directions that were not necessarily liberating. As a civic humanist vigorously opposed to withdrawal from public life yet reluctant to condone outright resistance to monarchy, Hume had no clear alternative to counteract the non-cooperation of the Stuart monarchy with his vision. Paradoxically, Hume contributed ultimately, if uneasily, to the intellectual foundations for the British destiny of the Stuart dynasty. Buchanan, on the other hand, had afforded an incisive and unequivocal critique of hierarchic and imperial kingship to which the Scottish Covenanters proved notably receptive when instigating revolt against Charles I.²⁰

A unique added ingredient to Scottish thinking on state formation and the promotion of patriotism was the celebration and commemoration of virtuous worthies, of scholars and soldiers as well as monarchs, a practice inspired by the attributes of classical heroism as propounded by both Ovid and Cicero. This classical conception was given political currency and enduring popular appeal through the first print run from the extant manuscripts of *The Wallace*, composed by Blind Harry in the fifteenth century as a heroic complement to *The Bruce* by John Barbour in the previous century. Published in 1570 in the aftermath of Reformation and civil war, and during a regency government, the selfless life of the martyred William Wallace, resistance fighter and upholder of the Scottish Commonwealth, came just a year before the printed life of Robert the Bruce, the perjured king who successfully consolidated the Scottish opposition to English hegemony during the Wars of Independence. As Buchanan was well aware in his reconstructed Scottish history, Wallace provided a historical example of lawful resistance while Bruce supported his advocacy of an independent, consensual monarchy. Thereafter the practice of printing heroic narratives in times of political upheaval became a unique and radical feature of the Scottish formulation. Further print runs of *The Wallace* in 1594 marked the high point and conclusion of the first phase of Presbyterian dominance in the Kirk of Scotland, when the national hero was enlisted to bolster Presbyterian convictions that Scotland was a chosen nation. It was no accident that a reprint of the heroic epic recalling the feats of Wallace was commissioned for publication by the Scottish Covenanters in 1640, in order to sustain a popular patriotism during the decisive phase of the Bishops' Wars against Charles I.²¹

These awkward if not always antithetical Britannic and Scottish perspectives gained international recognition. When seeking a distinctive

counterpoint to the composite delineation of Great Britain by Camden and Speed, Dutch typographers and cartographers turned to Buchanan, supplemented by Boece. In 1627, Bonaventure and Abraham Elzevirius published a topographical compilation, *Respublica, sive Status Regni Scotiae et Hiberniae*. Their selective representation, together with a summative history of the 'auld alliance' with France, underlined Scotland's status as a classical commonwealth independent of England. For Ireland, however, the evidence drawn predominantly from Camden and Speed was loaded in favour of its status as an English dependency. This difference was sustained by the publication of Joan Blaeu's *Grand Atlas*, in which Scotland was covered in book 12 of the Amsterdam edition of 1654, while Ireland, though recognised as a distinct European entity in book 13, was published as a supplement. The accompanying topographical sections were prepared primarily by Sir Robert Gordon of Straloch, an Aberdeenshire laird firmly wedded to the Graeco-Egyptian origins of the Scots, to the antiquity of the Scottish kingdom and to the emphatic rebuttal of Camden.²²

When Christian IV of Denmark, the brother-in-law of James I and uncle to Charles I, decided on a national history in Latin for the international commemoration of his country in general and of his Oldenburg dynasty in particular, he actually commissioned two historiographers royal to undertake the task. His first choice was a Dutch scholar with Danish roots, Johannes Pontanus, a long-standing acquaintance of Camden. However, his narrative, published in 1631 as *Rerum Danicarum historia*, borrowed primarily from Buchanan and ended in 1448, prior to the accession of the Oldenburgs. He was duly superseded by another Dutch scholar, Johannes Meursius, who completed a more succinct two-volume *Historica Danica* by 1638, which was more supportive to the imperial aspirations of the Oldenburgs and their endeavours to resist Swedish claims to the province of Scania and the dependent kingdom of Norway.²³

The Irish

Neither the Dutch nor the Danes had ready access to the one work of Renaissance scholarship that served as a corrective to both the antiquarian pretensions of the Scots and the hegemonic claims of the anglocentric Britons. *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* by Séathrún Céitinn (Geoffrey Keating), the principal text for the Irish formulation, was a history

purged of fable but written in Irish around 1634 and subsequently circulated in manuscript only. Keating's refutation of the kingship line fabricated by Boece and Buchanan was part of his wider rejection of the claim that Irish kings were ever dependent on Arthur or any other king of the Britons. Ireland was never part of any foreign dominion prior to the incursion of the Normans from England at the behest of the papacy in the twelfth century. At the same time, his underlying historical purpose was to demonstrate that Ireland was not a barbaric backwater requiring civilisation through conquest, plantation and the imposition of English common law, as argued by Camden's fellow antiquarian and the English attorney-general for Ireland, Sir John Davies.²⁴

In the common classical Gaelic tradition, both the native Irish and the Scots who migrated from Ireland were designated the *Gael* and all other inhabitants and invaders within Britain and Ireland were deemed the *Gall*. The Gael was associated with epic heroism, scholarship and fidelity and the Gall with the foreign and alien cultures that had come initially through the Gallic visits of Brutus and were perpetuated in Britain by the invasions of the Romans, the Saxons, the Danes and the Normans. Thus, Camden's civilising mission of the Britons against the Irish and the Scottish Goths was turned on its head. The Irish were comparable to any nation in Europe in terms of valour, learning and steadfastness in the Catholic faith. But Keating, as befitting a descendant of an Old English family, was also concerned to ensure that due place was given to the contribution of the *Sean-Gallaibh* as well as of the Gaelic Irish in sustaining Catholicism. Both groups should be designated *Éireannaigh* – that is, the Catholic Irish – in contrast to the *Nua-Gallaibh*, effectively the Protestant settlers who arrived as New English under the Tudors and as New British under the Stuarts. Nonetheless, this Catholic nation building remained located within the contexts of Britain and Ireland as multiple kingdoms.

Keating's perspective on constitutional relations within the three kingdoms was not so much imperial or even federative as associative. Although validating the national dynamic that gave rise to the Irish Confederation of Catholics during the 1640s, Keating was primarily concerned to legitimise the Irish acceptability of the Stuart dynasty.²⁵ Thus Charles I, like his father before him, should be recognised as the true king of Ireland, and in turn, Ireland should be accorded the same status as England and Scotland in her constitutional association with the Stuart dynasty – as a free, not a dependent, kingdom. Indeed, this process of legitimisation ensured that the Catholic Confederation sought

rapprochement with Charles I as the legitimate king of Ireland throughout the 1640s.²⁶

The shift from a Tudor to a Stuart dynasty in 1603 was particularly welcomed in Ireland. The rights of the Tudors to Ireland were due more to acquisition than assimilation through free association. James I, however, could claim direct descent not only from Fergus MacEarc, who had arrived from Ulster as first king of the Scottish Gaels, but also from the kings of the other provinces of Munster, Leinster and Connacht. His right to the high kingship of Ireland was endorsed theologically. Under the leadership of Peter Lombard, Archbishop of Armagh, the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland taught that James, despite his Protestantism, was *de iure* King of Ireland and entitled to temporal allegiance. This allegiance was eagerly affirmed by the Irish parliament in 1613, notwithstanding the writings of continental Jesuits that a heretical monarch could be deposed at papal instigation – writings which moved James to a vigorous defence of his independent empire to which unequivocal allegiance was owed by all subjects whether Catholic or Protestant.²⁷ Plantations in Ulster, Munster and Connacht soon dashed Irish Catholics' hopes that allegiance to the Stuart dynasty would be reciprocated by liberty of conscience. Nonetheless, Keating and other clerical agents of the Counter-Reformation validated the aims of the Catholic political elite for an accommodation with the crown that would associate Ireland as an equal partner, not as a confessionally disadvantaged satellite, within a composite British empire.²⁸

The Gothic

The endeavours of James I to effect not only regal union but the full integration of his British dominions provoked an English backlash, publicly evident in the historical dramas written to be performed on the London stage after 1603. The severing of English nationhood from its institutional roots is an integral part of the tragedy of *Macbeth*, in which William Shakespeare extolled an exclusive patriotism that England was in danger of losing by sleepwalking into British union. James I favoured an inclusive, Britannic political discourse which sat awkwardly with the anglocentric exclusivity favoured by Elizabeth and supported by received Calvinist claims that England was an elect nation. Whereas Elizabeth had advantageously gendered her exercise of power as a chaste protector of the English nation, James saw himself as the husband and the whole isle of Britain as his wife. English purity and, indeed, the virtue

of common law had to be protected from the endeavours of James to promote complete British union.²⁹

In the process of shifting the language of English nationhood away from monarchy to the common law as the protector of the English people, the stage was reinforcing the antiquarian message of the Gothic formulation. The formative role of the Anglo-Saxons in the constitutional history of England led Camden's associates, Sir Henry Spelman and John Selden, to play down British continuity from the Romans to the Normans. Unlike the splenetic attorney-general for England, Sir Edward Coke, who contended an immutable and continuous tradition in the common law from the time of the Britons, Spelman and Selden argued for the foundations of common law in the transmission of the immemorial Gothic predilection for liberty and constitutional assemblies during the Anglo-Saxon incursions of the fifth century. Institutional and cultural continuity in English life had been preserved despite Danish incursions in the ninth century and the Norman Conquest of 1066. Indeed, notwithstanding the stress on hereditary and authoritarian monarchy associated with this conquest, the Normans had facilitated the refinement of the constitutional assemblies of the Saxons into the parliaments that guaranteed English laws and liberties.³⁰ The rehabilitation of the Anglo-Saxon contribution through its positive identification with Gothic virtues, which could be represented chronologically rather than mythologically, has been attributed primarily to Richard Verstegan. His work on the *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, first published in 1605, was dedicated to James I in terms which excluded any other Britannic, Scottish or Irish perspective, 'as descendant of chiefest blood royal of our ancient English-Saxon kings'. Verstegan solidified the association of the Gothic virtues of the Germanic peoples with the migration of the Anglo-Saxons, which was the formative influence in fashioning the 'most noble and renowned English nation'.³¹

However, the humanist rehabilitation of Gothic civility was actually instigated in the mid-sixteenth century by Joannus and Olaus Magnus, and aided visually by the latter's *Carta Marina* (1539). The Magnus brothers, who served successively as the Roman Catholic bishops of Uppsala in exile on account of the Lutheran Reformation in Sweden, built upon the claims of Jordanes in the sixth century and Isidore of Seville in the seventh: that the Goths were direct descendants of Noah; that as the aboriginal people from Scandza, they spread over Europe and Asia; and that Sweden constituted the true heartland of the Goths, a people associated with a heroic civilisation that predated

that of either Greece or Rome. The moral and physical superiority of the Goths was confirmed by their formative role in the destruction of the Roman empire in the fifth century. These same civilised virtues upheld the Swedish break from the Kalmar Union with Denmark and Norway in the early fifteenth century and the right of the Swedish monarchy – elective but continuous from times immemorial – to lay claim to both Scania and Norway as territories settled by direct descendants of the Goths. Their work in Latin, which was composed during the 1530s but not published for another two decades, first in Rome, then in Paris, Antwerp and Basle, had a reported currency in England by 1559.³² England and Scotland were both identified as nations created from the Gothic diaspora. Joannus having claimed that the imperial aspirations of the Danish monarchy were without legal foundation and not just arbitrary but tyrannical, his Gothic rebuttal of 1536 was considered notably inflammatory during the Kalmar War of 1611–13, when Christian IV struggled to hold off Swedish territorial acquisitiveness. Furthermore, as the Magnus brothers offered a precedent for this acquisitiveness in the Scottish wresting of Orkney and Shetland from Denmark in the mid-fifteenth century, Christian's cordial relationship with his brother-in-law James I was strained by the latter's final annexation of the northern isles to the Scottish crown during the Kalmar War.³³

Following on from the Magnus brothers, Verstegan had claimed Tacitus as a primary source for Gothic antiquity. For Tacitus had identified the distinctive moral virtue of the Germanic peoples, whose aversion to arbitrary and hereditary government contrasted starkly with the duplicity, corruption and tyranny among the political elite prior to the fall of imperial Rome. This subversive commentary of Tacitus in relation to monarchy and imperialism found particular favour with Spelman and Selden. At the same time, Verstegan's stress on the positive civilising influence of the post-Roman Goths in shaping the nebulous but ancient constitution of England found a receptive audience among such fellow members of the Society of Antiquaries as Camden, Cotton and Speed. However, James I was not impressed with their investigations into English parliamentary development, and he had that Elizabethan foundation wound up in 1614.

The Britannic concept of imperial monarchy promoted by the early Stuarts was exclusive in asserting sovereignty free from the interference of the papacy or other foreign power, but inclusive in the organic sense of involving not just England and Wales, but Scotland and

Ireland as well. The Gothic proponents of English greatness through the supremacy of the common law placed contractual emphasis on rights, liberties and privileges which were applicable to all freeborn Englishmen, but which were exclusively English at the expense of differing Scottish legal traditions or Irish customs. Where the Anglo-Saxon invasion was held to be qualitatively different from that of the Romans, Danes and Normans was that the civilisation of England was advanced through the expulsion of the Britons. Thus the Welsh, the inspirational proponents of the Britannic formulation, were written out of the Gothic. The Welsh could be held to have acquired civility through assimilation into the expanding English state in the sixteenth century, an argument that also underwrote expulsion and plantation in Ireland. Scotland's putative Gothic past was not endorsed by institutional development comparable to that of England.³⁴

The extent to which non-anglocentric interests could be accommodated within the English body politic was the historic nub of the British problem. In formulating his Britannic concept of *ius imperium*, James I drew a cardinal distinction between the theoretically absolute powers of an imperial monarch and the empirical exercise of political entente through personal forbearance. On the one hand, James upheld the common law of England, whose tradition was based on precedent and case law reinforced by parliamentary enactment. On the other hand, he also drew on the Scottish tradition of civil (or Roman) law, which was based on principles of jurisprudence as perceived practically, though not always systematically, through 'practicks' into which were incorporated decisions by privy and judicial councils as by conventions of the political estates meeting in lieu of a parliament. In the former tradition, the English parliament was the supreme and sole legislature for matters of state. In the latter tradition, the Scottish parliament was the supreme, but not the sole, legislative body. Civil law as received in Scotland made an integral distinction between *ius regis*, as a universal concept relating to the whole framework of government, and *lex regis*, as a relative concept covering the specific acts, statutes or customs made in different societies by magistrates or rulers. Whereas *lex* was alterable when required for the common welfare, *ius* was a permanent feature of the fundamental law that not only governed the succession of the Stuarts, but was issued usually with the consent of the political nation or sustained by immemorial custom. Without *ius*, the key to civility, as the natural bond of human society, Scotland could not be an independent kingdom or Britain a true empire.³⁵

The principal propagator of this distinction between *ius* and *lex* was Sir Thomas Craig of Riccarton, the leading Scottish jurist and one of the joint parliamentary commissioners charged by James I to negotiate the actual terms for full and complete union from 1604. As close agreement was apparent on the fundamentals of *ius* in both Scotland and England, Riccarton contended that there need be no insurmountable obstacle to the harmonising of civil and common laws. James had admonished the English parliament in 1607 that the civil framework of government in Scotland should not be sacrificed to an imperial construct in which English common law would invariably predominate. James had also ridiculed any suggestion that Scotland should be garrisoned like a Spanish province. But he rather tactlessly made comparisons with Sicily and Naples, which provoked the Scottish Estates to temper their support for a unified British empire if it resulted in their governance by a viceroy or deputy. The more obvious, albeit implicit, exemplar was not Spain's Italian provinces but the English dependency of Ireland.

Despite Riccarton's prompting on the joint commission, perfect union tended to be interpreted on the English side as the full integration of both government and laws. The more gradualist position in favour of political and commercial integration also came under sustained attack from vested legal and mercantile interests in the English parliament of 1606–7. Four years of fitful negotiations by the joint commissioners eventually foundered on the back of English concepts of political hegemony and parliamentary supremacy.³⁶ The English had been required, when extending their authority in Ireland as later when arguing for closed seas around the king's British dominions, to temper common law with civil law. Nonetheless, there was a marked aversion by the autumn of 1607 to accepting any innovative arrangement for union that neither accorded supremacy nor deferred ultimately to common law, the quintessentially Gothic basis of English parliamentary privileges, religious liberties and rights of property.³⁷

The strained resolution of Colvin's Case under English law in 1608 accorded common nationality to all those born within Britain since the regal union. In promoting this objective as attorney-general for England, Sir Francis Bacon argued before the House of Commons that the benefit of conceding naturalisation to the Scots was the undoubted association of the three kingdoms on English terms: that is, by assimilation through the spread of the common law rather than by an accommodation with the civil law of Scotland. In establishing the *ius imperium* of the Stuarts, James had sought to accommodate the separate legal traditions by

leavening the relativism of the common law with Scottish fundamentalism. Bacon was arguing for an expansion of the composite English kingdom that had absorbed Wales and Cornwall in the sixteenth century, not for the creation of a composite British empire. The spread of the common law to Scotland would enhance the security of England by making permanent the sundering of the ‘auld alliance’ with France. In arguing that British civility was tied strategically to English security, he was underscoring the case made by Sir John Davies, that the imposition of the common law would not only reduce Ireland to obedience, but also cut off the threat of invasion from Spain. Indeed, for Bacon, having Scotland united and Ireland reduced through the common law was the constitutional bedrock of English greatness as an elect kingdom capable of global expansion.³⁸

Such a Gothic perspective as favoured by common lawyers and parliamentarians, like the Britannic as espoused by the early Stuarts, was undoubtedly anglocentric. But the imperial vision of the early Stuarts ensured that Britain was always something more than England. For the English common lawyers who regulated government and the parliamentarians who voted supply, Britain *was* England. The Gothic was potentially the most revolutionary of the four rival perspectives as it not only disregarded the Scottish and the Irish, but also threatened to reduce three kingdoms to one kingdom with two satellite states. Only the Scottish perspective offered a radical alternative, the federative restructuring of Britain; yet in that Ireland was to remain an English dependency. The Britannic, the Gothic and the Scottish shared a common Protestantism for which the Irish perspective was essentially disruptive and unobtainable without recourse to violence.

These awkward, even antithetical, perspectives which constituted the British problem had a further defining element. Regardless of confessional differences, each perspective claimed the backing of providence and prophecy in seeking to influence public support for the status quo or revolution.

Providence and Prophecy

The rival perspectives that constituted the British problem were not only founded on Renaissance scholarship but were also propagated through providence and prophecy. These revelatory features of God’s divine purpose, which were rooted in the Judaic–Christian tradition, cut across the confessional divide opened up by the Reformation. The revealed will

of God was explained in contractual terms to his people by covenanting. Divine revelation was further enhanced by miracles. As a religious counter to classical auguries of fortune and fate, providentialism upheld God's plan for the universe, whether applied generally to nations or specifically to individuals. Richard Boyle, 1st Earl of Cork, who had risen from the ranks of a minor Kent family in the 1590s to become one of the richest men in the British Isles by the 1630s, penned an autobiography which demonstrated how providence had worked inherently to his spiritual and material benefit. God's majesty, evident through his manifest conferral of blessings and punishments, motivated mankind regardless of social standing or economic resources to strive collectively for grace and seek individual assurance of salvation. In the Reformed teaching dominated by Calvinism throughout the British Isles, individual providence confirmed the predestined salvation of the elect notwithstanding the reprobate tendencies of the majority of their nation. At the same time, the wholesale striving of a nation to live gracefully was indicative of their general status as a chosen people.³⁹

Covenant or federal theology mitigated the impersonal and absolute sovereignty of God in moving individuals and nations to demonstrate their faith through purposeful works as well as graceful living. This theology, which had a particular appeal to evangelical Protestants from Transylvania to New England, emphasised the contractual relationship between God and man rather than the stark Calvinist reliance on election by divine decree. Predestination and, thereby, man's ultimate dependence on divine grace was not denied. The true believer proved his or her election by covenanting with God, not by exercising his or her free will to choose salvation. Divine grace moved man to covenant. But once man had so banded himself to God he was assured of election.

Miracles were inexplicable occurrences brought about by divine intervention that demonstrated mankind's limited capacity to comprehend ordained judgements. In Reformed teaching, miracles were achieved without the intercession of saints or angels and made manifest the necessity of obeying the will of God. The miraculous acquisition of divine favour had to be balanced against the terrible wrath that accompanied its loss. Miracles signalling the imminent deliverance of the elect mitigated rather than negated their prolonged suffering to secure salvation. The reprobate remained damned. Protestant pulpits throughout the Stuart's dominions carried the prophetic warning that national apostasy assured heavenly vengeance.⁴⁰

Biblical prophecy offered a divine explanation for natural occurrences such as famine, pestilence and war as harbingers of God's wrath on reprobate peoples. Famine in Scotland during 1623, followed by plague in England on the death of James I in 1625 (a recurrence of that experienced at the regal union in 1603) and an outbreak of dearth and cattle disease in Ireland three years later, served as the prophetic context for George Wither's warning to 'the British nation' in 1628. According to Wither, endemic impiety was occasioning the blanketing of Britain by a storm cloud that presaged the spread of war from continental Europe which would bring further death and destruction.⁴¹ At the same time, the predictions within the book of Revelation became a touchstone not only for the progress of the Protestant Reformation in northern Europe, but also for British political reconfiguration as the first step towards apocalyptic world reordering. Such prophesying revealed the footsteps of providence in preparing a way for the conversion of the Jews to Christianity.⁴²

Astrology provided a partial complement by offering a systematic, if cryptic, methodology for studying the heavens to interpret portents such as comets and eclipses. The general interpretation of current conditions, whether political, social or environmental, was deemed the province of natural astrology. Specific interpretations of future private and public developments based on individual astral readings – as through horoscopes – were viewed as judicial astrology. Leading practitioners of the natural as well as the judicial claimed they pursued Christian astrology that accorded with providentialism and prophecy. Natural astrology claimed a close association with natural philosophy and astronomy. Indeed, Johannes Kepler, a pioneer of the laws of motion, was lauded more for his prediction of the European conflagration known as the Thirty Years War, a prediction that coincided with the regal union of 1603. Judicial astrology was more pragmatic and less scientific. Its favourable reception was compounded by the popularity of secular or non-biblical prophecy. Secular prophecy did have religious roots, however, having first been attributed to the saints of the early church, such as Patrick, Columba and Malachy, then to wizards such as Merlin, William Ambrose and Thomas the Rhymer. Historical chroniclers drawn overwhelmingly from religious orders in the early and high middle ages, such as Bede, Geoffrey of Monmouth and Giraldus Cambrensis, passed on the utterances of the saints and wizards. Thus secular prophecy was woven into the fabric of the myth making that had shaped the Britannic, Irish, Scottish and Gothic perspectives. Secular prophecy, which was deliberately opaque and ambiguous, had the immeasurable

merit of being recyclable. Select revelations were readily updated and adapted to the sweeping political and religious changes that characterised the British Isles in the mid-seventeenth century.⁴³

Although prophecy was integrally bound up with political partisanship between 1629 and 1660, it has tended to be associated with the exotic and the quixotic sectarianism exhibited by the fringe groupings that ranged from the Quakers and the Ranters through to the Seekers and the Fifth Monarchists and on to the Diggers and the Muggletonians.⁴⁴ Despite its close if not always amicable association with such legal and natural philosophers as Francis Bacon, John Selden and Elias Ashmole, prophecy has also been deemed unscientific in an English context.⁴⁵ The prominent role of women seers – from Ursula (Mother) Shipton at the English Reformation to Lady Eleanor Audley (alias Davies and later Douglas) in the reign of Charles I – has been attributed to their negotiation of a public space in which to venture opinions on current affairs that were denied conventional outlets through their marginalisation in public life.⁴⁶ However, marginality was certainly not a feature of the work of either seer, which proved highly adaptable to editorial reinterpretation to suit changing political circumstances in the 1640s and 1650s. Moreover, to emphasise prophecy as an aspect of feminist expression is to undervalue the contemporaneous outpouring of women's commentaries on political and social affairs in both print and manuscript.⁴⁷

The philosophical centrality of providence and prophecy to political life was upheld by the leading European jurist of the early seventeenth century. Hugo de Groot, alias Grotius, saw God's providential hand in both the conserving and the altering of empires and commonwealths. Further proof for his discourse was sought in miracles and predictions that were authenticated historically. For in well-established kingdoms, as in commonwealths, 'nothing is want to be done beside the Common Laws, unless by the Will of the Supreme Governor'. Predictions not only came from Hebrew prophets, but were also supported classically by Greek and Roman oracles and, more recently and famously, by the Mexicans and Peruvians foretelling the arrival of the Spaniards and the calamities that ensued for the native peoples in Latin America.⁴⁸

Providence and prophecy were integral aspects not of a vulgar, but of a vernacular, culture that covered all the languages in the British Isles. Enhanced but not stimulated by the removal of censorship at the outset of the 1640s, providential and prophetic texts were circulated in manu-

script as well as in print through almanacs, tracts, engravings and, above all, chapbooks in England. This material, though focused on London and designed primarily for ‘the south parts of Great Britain’, was also imported into Scotland and Ireland.⁴⁹ Chapbooks also circulated in the Scots language, while vernacular poetry in Scottish and Irish Gaelic developed a cutting edge in political and social criticism. In part, Irish poetry was stimulated by the Counter-Reformation, but like other vernacular texts it was responding primarily to the unprecedented demand for ideological, military and financial commitment in all three kingdoms during the 1640s.⁵⁰ Vernacular commentaries deploying providence and prophecy served as propaganda counterpoints to both the pulpits and official proclamations, and were no less influential in conditioning public opinion than the newsletters and broadsheets that flourished at the time. Vernacular commentaries, moreover, were less susceptible to influence by the political elite. Yet they also shaped public perceptions throughout the British Isles and conditioned the constituent peoples to anticipate and respond to change. Overturning the established order through violence, upheaval, convulsion and, ultimately, revolution was divinely destined.⁵¹

Prior to the outbreak of the Bishops’ Wars in Scotland in 1639, providence and prophecy were deployed in domestic, international and transoceanic contexts. Domestically, vernacular commentaries warned of divine wrath through famine, plague and war. Internationally, they were on guard against the external threat from the Habsburgs, the papacy, and other forces of the Antichrist. Globally, but primarily in the transatlantic setting, they celebrated the establishment of colonies or the deliverance of merchant adventurers in less than hospitable environments from the Caribbean and New England to Greenland. During the 1640s, providence and prophecy were utilised principally in a vernacular context that was both British and revolutionary. They were applied by partisans of all sides to the outcome of battles won and lost or occasionally avoided. They consoled the elect with the divine assurance of salvation despite the reprobate behaviour of the majority that brought about military setbacks and even massacres. They justified political purging and regime changes in the name of godliness. They confirmed the favoured nation status of all three kingdoms during the civil wars. During the 1650s, providence and prophecy upheld the special position of fortress England, assailed as it was both internally and externally by ungodly influences. They anticipated the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. Above all, their staple inclusion in vernacular commentaries

publicised and propagated the increasingly bloody perceptions that constituted the British problem.⁵²

Antipathetic Applications

Irish perceptions legitimising the Stuarts as the true heirs to the three kingdoms drew not only on genealogical tradition, but also on such associated mechanisms as providence and prophecy – the same mechanisms that ensured that the Catholic Confederation would seek a political accommodation with Charles I throughout the 1640s.⁵³ At the same time, the providential role of the Irish people as a distinctive entity within the Stuart dominions, which was reinvigorated by vernacular poetry, was notably enhanced by the teachings of the Franciscan Order, the main missionary force for the Counter-Reformation, which allied a liberation theology to a civic covenant. Its Irish College of St Anthony of Padua at Louvain was founded in the wake of the flight of the leading Gaelic earls of Ulster into Habsburg service in the Spanish Netherlands. Less concerned with inward repentance than with national deliverance, providence and prophecy in Ireland were linked to the struggle of the Jewish Maccabees, the Old Testament sect that fought to keep Israel pure from the external corruption associated with imperial conquest. In particular, the heroic endeavour of Judas Maccabeus to deliver the Hebrew people was harnessed to the teaching of the thirteenth-century Franciscan theorist John Duns Scotus. Political authority was based not on divine right kingship, but on the social consensus which bound a people together in a political commonwealth.

These teachings, in which the children of Israel in search of deliverance from oppression assumed the bardic guise of *Clann Israel*, inspired Owen Roe O'Neill, the nephew of the expropriated Hugh, Earl of Tyrone, to mobilise the Irish brigades in exile. His first endeavour, to secure Spanish backing for an invasion of Ireland in 1627, never got off the drawing board, primarily because of Habsburg concerns about reconciling the rival territorial factions that made up this Irish enterprise. However, O'Neill's next endeavour, for which he secured the release of Irish forces from Habsburg service, was to instigate the Irish rebellion in October 1641, not in opposition to Charles I, but to liberate the kingdom. The rebellious native Irish and Old English forces merged themselves into a Confederation resolved to accommodate provincial allegiances and reconcile territorial rivalries. The Confederation of Irish Catholics was duly instituted at Kilkenny in March 1642.⁵⁴

The rooting of resistance in biblical prophecy and the association of the troubles of the Catholic Irish with the struggles of the Israelites was an inspirational counter to the Britannic portrayal of colonising and conquest in Ireland as aspects of classical civility. Nonetheless, as during the Nine Years War against Tudor rule, which collapsed in 1601, the Britannic forces arrayed against Irish rebellion in the 1640s were no more averse to drawing on secular prophecy and, in particular, astrology to decide locations of battles and to attest the invincibility of their forces. Secular prophecy, however, offered a mixed message for Irish perceptions favouring national deliverance. On the one hand, a prophecy attributed to Merlin which predicted disaster for the English in Ireland as the culmination of over 70 years of catastrophe from the Reformation was circulating in vernacular Irish well in advance of the rebellion in 1641. On the other hand, the Nine Years War had given currency to prophecies that only the Scots would defeat the Irish, a prophecy which acquired particular potency when the Covenanters moved forces into Ulster within two months of the Catholic Confederacy being established at Kilkenny.⁵⁵

Notwithstanding strictures from both Roman Catholic and Protestant clerics against secular prophecy, James Ussher, who became the Anglican primate in Ireland as Archbishop of Armagh, quoted Mother Shipton and other prophets extensively when composing his *Britannicarum Ecclesiarum Antiquitates* of 1639. This publication coincided with the outbreak of the Bishops' Wars, when the prophecies of Mother Shipton, regarding the outbreak of war in the spring which the Scots would bring into England, had a potent vernacular currency.⁵⁶ Although Ussher himself made no claim to be a seer, he gained a considerable posthumous reputation as a prophet from the 1650s. His summative warning in a sermon at Dublin in 1601, that Ireland faced 40 years of judgement, was heralded as foretelling the Irish rebellion. His further warning in a sermon at Cambridge in 1625 about the consuming flames of wickedness was interpreted as predicting that the newly crowned Charles I would be confronted by war for his three kingdoms.⁵⁷ Ussher's primary concern, however, was not the propagation of prophecy based on biblical and secular texts but the endorsement of the Britannic vision of a godly monarchy as a matter of urgency. For the confidence in the ultimate victory of the godly over Antichrist, which inspired Calvinists throughout Britain, stood in marked contrast to Protestant perceptions in Ireland, that in the last days Antichrist would be at its strongest and the godly would be threatened with their greatest sufferings and perse-

cution.⁵⁸ Accordingly, Ussher was among the more earnest of the Protestant episcopate in the three kingdoms who endorsed, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, the imperial concept of British union as advocated by James I.⁵⁹

John Thornborough, Bishop of Bristol, viewed the providential reunification of the British empire under a godly monarch as an occasion of great happiness that would be perfected by the eventual merging of the constituent identities of England and Scotland into a composite British nation.⁶⁰ James I himself had sponsored the publication of two works in Scotland that sought to ally providence and prophecy to his Britannic project. The claims of an anonymous English apologist that the miraculous and happy union between England and Scotland would prove expeditious and profitable to both nations, and stop unnecessary wars, were reprinted in Edinburgh in 1604. This attempt to convince the Scottish Estates to participate, without equivocation, in the creation of 'the moste opulent, strong and entire Empire of the worlde', which would be capable of transatlantic confrontation with Spain and the papacy, was made redundant by the failure of the English parliament to support political incorporation.⁶¹ Nonetheless, James remained determined to demonstrate that secular prophecy had run its course, and that his accession to the English throne was the peaceful fulfilment of British unification not only predicted by the likes of Merlin, Bede and Thomas the Rhymer, but also endorsed from French and Danish sources. A text, published in Edinburgh with royal approval in 1617 and printed in both Latin verse and Scots metre, gained notable British currency throughout the 1640s. For the prophecies favouring union and concerted action against the papal Antichrist could also be interpreted to uphold Covenanting claims against the absentee Stuart monarch to secure Scottish deliverance from dependence on England, their recovery of Berwick-upon-Tweed (lost since the Wars of Independence) and the imposition of British unification from the north.⁶²

The realignment of the Britannic perspective to serve the Royalist cause of Charles I led to the reissue of Thornborough's plea of 1604 for a composite British nation in 1641. At the same time, Thomas Heywood published his *Life of Merlin*, which allied secular prophecy to a chronological account of English history from Brut to Charles I. Thus, the accession of the Stuart dynasty in 1603 was not only the fulfilment of prophecy but also the laying to rest of English hegemonic claims over Scotland.⁶³ Ussher's contemporaneous work on biblical chronology had reputedly undermined the mythic line of Scottish kings, and in the

process Buchanan's staunch advocacy of a contractual rather than an organic bond between monarchy and civil society.⁶⁴ But Buchanan's vibrant intellectual legacy was central to the Scottish formulation. Evident in the contractual interpretation of fundamental law favoured by the Scottish Estates in the negotiations for union that were terminated in 1607, this legacy resurfaced in the National Covenant of 1638, the centrepiece of Scottish providentialism in the mid-seventeenth century.⁶⁵

Notwithstanding differences in polity between Episcopalianism and Presbyterianism, the Protestant doctrine of the Kirk of Scotland had remained staunchly Calvinist since the Reformation. The Arminian challenge, first aroused within the Dutch Reformed Kirk before spreading to the Church of England, had gained no foothold in Scotland before 1629. Arminianism accepted Calvinist orthodoxy with regard to original sin and justification by faith, but rejected its absolute belief in predestination which offered salvation only for the elect and eternal damnation for the reprobate. Hence, the Calvinist teaching that the grace of God was irresistible for the elect, who as the true believers could not fall from grace, was renounced in favour of universal atonement. This precept offered salvation to every individual prepared to repent of his or her sins. For the Arminian, therefore, the assurance of salvation was freely available for all believers but conditional on human endeavour. For the Calvinist, who believed in absolute and exclusive salvation for the elect, belief in free will was an unwarrantable limitation on the sovereignty of God. The Kirk, however, was concerned not only to promote the salvation of the elect but to identify the national interest with a dutiful dedication to the godly life. Doctrinal precepts, moreover, underwrote the international responsibilities of the Kirk, which retained a watching brief over the fate of Reformed Protestantism. This special concern was intensified by the course of the Counter-Reformation and the political alignments brought about by the Thirty Years War. For the alliance of militant Catholicism and Habsburg autocracy was ranged against and initially triumphant over Reformed interests within the Holy Roman Empire.⁶⁶

Kirk-inspired fears of the Counter-Reformation, coupled to James I's decided preference for erastian Episcopalianism after 1603, prompted militant Presbyterians to band together locally in covenants. Banding together for the purposes of local government or political alliance was a socially established practice in Scotland that had been adopted specifically for religious purposes at the Reformation. Yet the description of a religious band as a covenant only gained common currency after 1590,

as a result of the arrival from the continent of covenant or federal theology. In Scotland, as in New England, the idea of the covenant was popularly translated in the early seventeenth century not simply as an elaboration of God's compact with the elect, but as a means of revealing God's purposes towards his people.⁶⁷ At its most potent, the covenant could be interpreted as a divine band between God and the people of Scotland. Such a covenant had a comprehensive appeal for Scottish society as a whole, not just the political elite. Covenanting was still a minority activity for Presbyterians in the opening decades of the seventeenth century, however. After the exhortation from the Kirk's general assembly for a mutual band between ministers and their congregations in 1596, no national renewal occurred until 1638.⁶⁸

In return for a guarantee that James I would attempt no further liturgical innovations, the Scottish Estates in 1621 had ratified the Five Articles, whose most controversial aspect was that all members of congregations were required to kneel when participating in communion. The ensuing reluctance of the bishops to publicise nonconformity by prosecution had enabled Presbyterian laity, with the connivance of sympathetic ministers, either to absent themselves from communion or to refrain from kneeling. A more radical development was the covert growth of praying societies, known as conventicles, which sought to sustain the purity of the Kirk by private meetings for collective devotion. By 1629, conventicling circuits established for preaching and administering nonconforming communions had spread from Edinburgh to Fife, to west-central and south-west Scotland and on into Ulster. In essence, conventiclers were a pressure group who acted as catalysts for rather than instigators of revolution. Collective as well as personal discipline was maintained by periodic fasting. Their militant sense of righteousness reinforced their assurance that they were God's elect on earth. However, their elitist image, not dissimilar to that of the Puritans in New England, exposed them to charges of separatism.⁶⁹

For their part, the conventiclers were not convinced that the nobles, as leaders of the political nation disaffected with the authoritarian rule of Charles I, were intent on the pursuit of godliness. Nonetheless, the disaffected leadership came to appreciate the ideological advantage of such an association. For the conventiclers were foremost among nonconforming Presbyterians advocating communal banding in covenants as the alternative religious standard to liturgical innovations promoted imperiously by Charles I and the Arminian-inclined Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud. The covenant of grace and works not only

assured the righteous of their temporal as well as their spiritual calling, but affirmed the special relationship between God and Scotland whose people were heirs to ancient Israel as his covenanted nation. Thus, covenanting in Scotland was a tangible manifestation of the divine connection between God and the Scottish people. Covenanting adherence in Scotland was not so much a decisive cause of revolt against Charles I as a means of communicating symbolically a fundamental ideological message: that opposition to the royal prerogative in defence of religious and civil liberty was divinely warranted. By identifying their cause with the covenant of grace and works, the disaffected availed themselves of the seventeenth-century equivalent of liberationist theology, which found political expression first through the National Covenant for Scotland in 1638 and then through the Solemn League and Covenant for Britain in 1643.⁷⁰

The act of covenanting provided the Scots with the political will to effect British revolution. No less potent, though lacking public endorsement from Presbyterian ministers, was the popular appeal of secular prophecy. A gentleman of Newcastle writing to a friend in London on 8 September 1640, when the north of England was occupied by the Covenanting Army at the conclusion of the Bishops' Wars, records the insolent discourse of the common Scottish soldiers. Not only did they routinely disparage the Royalist war effort and, indeed, the martial prowess of the English nation, but in their cups they justified their conquest as the fulfilment of prophecy. Particularly remarkable was their recitation of verses translated from Latin into Scots, attributed to Merlin and applied to the course of the Bishops' Wars, 'and they beleeve it noe lesse then Gospell'. These verses were in fact textual variants of the first in the series of *The Whole Prophecies* printed in Edinburgh and dedicated to King James of Great Britain in 1617. Especial weighting was given to the lines asserting that England faced forcible flattening, sudden death and ruination, having been betrayed from within as well as besieged by the Scots. Irish plotting and Welsh menaces were compounded by French hostility and Dutch alienation, which foretold greater griefs to come.⁷¹

Such prophesying underscored the commitment of the Covenanting movement to secure recognition from the crown and the English parliament of the political independence of Scotland, recognition attained by the Treaty of London in August 1641. Conversely, prophesying from the perspective of Merlin Caledonicus on reformation rather than conquest also facilitated the refashioning of the regal union into British confederation, the substance of the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 that

found institutional expression through the Committee of Both Kingdoms from 1644 to 1646.⁷² However, prophecy that foretold a return to peace in the British Isles after the cathartic impact of war on all three kingdoms instigated from the north could be utilised also from a Gothic perspective: thus, the prospect of the English triumphing over internal foes as well as external enemies justified the forcible conquest of Ireland and the occupation of Scotland by Oliver Cromwell in 1650–51.⁷³

The Gothic interpretation of providence and prophecy in England had initially shared a common grounding in Calvinist orthodoxy with the Britannic. Protestant polemicists through sermons and journals viewed the repeated intervention of the Almighty as confirmation that England was an elect nation. But the whole nation was not chosen for salvation, thus the religious sense of nationhood fostered by providentialism and prophecy was discriminatory and ultimately divisive, with transatlantic fault lines opening up from the 1620s between Puritans and Arminians and from the 1640s between Presbyterianism and Independent Congregationalists.⁷⁴ God's providential frustration of the Spanish Armada in 1588, of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605 and of the Spanish match between the Infanta and Prince Charles in 1624 were translated vernacularly into celebrations of national deliverance marked by bonfires, the ringing of church bells and public holidays. By the 1630s, however, these celebrations against the satanic alliance of the Habsburgs and the papacy were increasingly identified with Puritanism and the preservation of Calvinist orthodoxy.⁷⁵ Although this stance can appear xenophobic and insular, Calvinist orthodoxy had been sustained at the Synod of Dort in 1618, held on the recommendation of James I and attended by British clerics to counter the growth of Arminianism in and from the United Provinces.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, with Charles I married to the French Catholic Henrietta Maria in 1625, and with his endeavours to distance himself from the northern European Protestant powers in favour of a Habsburg rapprochement after 1632, Puritan apprehensions were heightened rather than abated by the favour accorded to Arminianism by William Laud. As Archbishop of Canterbury from 1633, he was more interested in a peaceful accommodation with the papacy than with the perpetuation of militant antagonism towards Rome.⁷⁷

Polarisation between Puritanism and Arminianism turned what had been primarily a localised or regional festive culture into an English political divide – in effect, a vernacular contention between the Britannic and the Gothic that predated the military divide of the civil wars.⁷⁸ Undoubtedly, the Gothic perspective gained a particular momentum by

linking the dangers of Roman Catholicism towards England with the purportedly extensive massacres of Protestants in Ireland in 1641. The subsequent deposition of witnesses testified to the treacherous intent of the Irish rebels to reject English overlordship, whether exercised by Charles I or Parliament, and to establish their own monarchy with the full backing of the papacy. Deliverance from the popish plots and Irish designs on England engineered by the Catholic Confederates remained a recurrent theme of almanacs and other vernacular publications during the 1640s.⁷⁹

Conversely, the Scots were viewed benignly, as military guarantors for the English parliament in its protection of laws and liberties against an authoritarian monarchy, a fraternal assistance that was consolidated by the Solemn League and Covenant in 1643. Over the next five years, however, the prospect of Presbyterian solidarity gave way before the rise of Oliver Cromwell and the Independents, the formation of the New Model Army and the failed Engagement between Charles I and conservative Covenanters. Although Cromwell remained supportive of the radical Covenanters who reasserted their political control in 1648, the trial and execution of Charles I and the attempted Scottish patriotic accommodation with Charles II as the covenanted King of Great Britain drove an irreparable breach between the Gothic and Scottish perspectives. Covenanters became as much enemies as the Irish Confederates. Accordingly, George Wither, the vernacular soothsayer and Puritan poet, who had originally fought against the Scottish Covenanters during the Bishops' Wars, signalled his move from Royalist sympathiser to Parliamentary stalwart in *Britain's Second Rembrancer* (1641). While he remained virulently anti-Irish, his attitudes towards the Scots were mollified by the Covenanters' support for the Parliamentary forces, in which he acquired the rank of major. Nonetheless, the internecine divisions between the English and the Welsh, the Scots and the Irish were likened to a discordant game of cards, presaging either the tearing asunder or the forcible reunification of all three kingdoms in *Prosopopoeia Britannica* (1648). A supporter of the regicide, Wither's call to the well-affected for public thanksgiving for the English republic's merciful deliverance from domestic and foreign tyrants was articulated in *The British Appeal* (1650), which lambasted both the bloody Irish and the acquisitive Scots (for their designs on the four northern English counties which they had occupied in 1640–41 and again from 1644 to 1647).⁸⁰

Wither and, to a far greater extent, John Milton were proponents of the prophetic epic which bolstered the Gothic nature of the republican

regime in England during the 1650s, a decade in which providence and prophecy not only shaped the political argument but inspired Oliver Cromwell and his closest associates to claim divine sanction for their conquest and incorporation of both Ireland and Scotland into first the Commonwealth and then the Protectorate from 1654. Indeed, John Milton claimed that the Commonwealth was the true heir to British loyalty originally vested in the Stuarts and then in the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643. The refusal of the Irish and the Scots to accept the regicide were manifestations of their selfish sectional interests that ran against the commonweal to which England alone remained providentially committed. The underhand behaviour of powerful factions in both countries disguised their violent intentions to undermine the English core of British loyalty. No matter their aggressive behaviour as conquerors, republican commentators were shielded from self-criticism by the godly reason with which the English under Cromwell had reconstructed themselves not just as a superior but as a chosen people.⁸¹ Cromwell's close political associate and ambassador to Sweden, Bulstrode Whitelocke, personifies the polemical importance of further bolstering the Gothic standpoint with judicial astrology. Not only was the first English translation of Olaus Magnus dedicated to him in 1658,⁸² but he was the assiduous patron of William Lilly, the most prolific and prosperous astrologer of the mid-seventeenth century, who initially published his revelations under the sobriquet *Merlinus Anglicus Junior* or, alternatively, *England's Prophetical Merlin* from 1644.

Lilly's extensive output, his vigorous engagement with Royalist rivals like Sir George Wharton and his close association with first Parliament and then the Commonwealth make him an immensely valuable political weathervane for the emergent dominance of the Gothic perspective by the late 1640s.⁸³ In 1644, Lilly attested his willingness to serve his country and promote unity between England, Scotland and Ireland. While England and Scotland had consolidated their union through Parliamentarians and Covenanters, he predicted Ireland would in time come in 'when the blood of the massacred English Protestants is restored'. He also informed the Covenanting movement in 1645 that 'some waspish Antagonists of that nation against Astrology' would not diminish his love for Scotland. By 1647, he asserted his confidence that Scotland would resist traitorous accommodations with the Royalists and continue to assist the Parliamentary forces against 'the inhumane' Irish Confederates. In the course of the Engagement between conservative Covenanters and Charles I, he dismissed 'those who plead Scottish civil-

ity or call them Brethren' as an affront to Parliament. At the same time, he was still prepared to exonerate from blame the radical Covenanters opposed to the Engagement, whom he deemed honourable and lovable. In the aftermath of the regicide and the attempted patriotic accommodations with Charles II, he became an apologist for English republican hegemony over both Scotland and Ireland.⁸⁴

While his capacity to predict the outcome of battles and the lifting of sieges enhanced his public reputation, Lilly's acclaimed powers of prognostication were expressed most notably in his interpretation of such prophecies as the White King, the Dreadful Deadman and the Lyon of the North. The first of these, who brought about British disunity and the invasion of England from Scotland, was identified with Charles I, articulating a fear within court circles that had sought unsuccessfully to dissuade the monarch from wearing white robes at his English coronation in 1625. His interpretation of the second prophecy paved the way for Oliver Cromwell as the restorer of order throughout the British Isles. By denying that Charles II was the Lyon of the North – an appellation also applied to Gustav II Adolph, the Swedish leader of the Protestant forces in the Thirty Years War at the outset of the 1630s – Lilly negated the restoration of the Stuarts through a patriotic accommodation with the Scots in 1650–51. However, he did leave the door open for the eventual Restoration of Charles II to all three kingdoms from the north, albeit he predicted this would happen in 1663 rather than in 1660.⁸⁵

In the same way that Milton led the Gothic claims for providential authority in his anglocentric interpretation of Britain, Lilly had demonstrated the flexibility of prophecy when applied to a Gothic perspective on contemporary politics. The Restoration ostensibly marked a more sceptical approach to the impact of providence and prophecy, as evident in the reminiscences of the exiled Royalist Edward Hyde, who attributed rebellion primarily to natural causes, and in the religious exegesis of such displaced academics as John Rotheram, formerly of Oxford but writing from Barbados, to affirm that the age of miracles had passed. Nonetheless, a desire to judge men for their conduct in the revolutionary decades remained a political as well as a religious imperative.⁸⁶ For those contemporaries within, rather than detached from, the three kingdoms at the Restoration, the prevailing discourse remained that of providential triumphalism reinforced by biblical as well as secular prophecy. Thus, the Riders Almanacs, produced under the title of *The British Merlin*, moved seamlessly from a Gothic to a Britannic perspective between 1656 and 1661. Simultaneously, the restoration of the Stuart dynasty aligned

God's special providence, prophetic deliverance and historic legitimacy not only with the Britannic perspective, but also with the conclusion of the political convulsions that had divided the British Isles since the time of Brut.⁸⁷ Manifestly, the Restoration marked the final phase of the British Revolution. However, there was no need to look further back for its origins than the prerogative rule of Charles I, set within the transnational and transoceanic context of the Britannic empire.

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