
A NEW
HISTORY
OF BRITAIN
SINCE 1688

FOUR NATIONS
AND AN EMPIRE

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INTRODUCTION

THE BRITISH ISLES AND THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN 1688



Yes and No voters square off in Glasgow, 2014.

In early September 2014, ten days before Scots were to cast their votes in a referendum that would determine whether they remained in the United Kingdom, polls showed that the decision was too close to call. The results stunned politicians in Westminster, who had cavalierly assumed that the vote for independence would fall decidedly short. Panicked now by the findings of pollsters, the leaders of the three Westminster parties rushed to Scotland, collectively issuing a "vow" that if Scots voted no on the referendum, Parliament would grant them broad and extensive powers to determine their own fates in their own elected assembly. For the next week and a half, David Cameron (1966–), the Conservative prime minister, his coalition partner Nick Clegg (1967–) of the Liberal Democratic Party, and Gordon Brown (1951–), former Labour prime minister and a Scot, lobbied hard for the "Better Together" campaign (sometimes called in the press the "No, Thanks" campaign), while Alex Salmond (1954–), first minister of Scotland and leader of the Scottish Nationalist Party, rallied supporters of independence across the country for the "Yes" campaign. A number of banks issued dire warnings about the fate of the Scottish banking system should "Yes" voters win, and chief executive officers of major companies announced that they would take their businesses south should such an outcome prevail. After church near Balmoral on the Sunday before the referendum, Queen Elizabeth (1926–) walked over to greet well-wishers and, in conversation with them, allowed as how she hoped the Scots would "think very carefully about the future" when they cast their ballots on September 18. The fact that her apparently spontaneous remark had been deeply considered and coordinated

with Westminster politicians, as the *Guardian* reported later, demonstrates just how alarmed British officials had become by the real prospect of Scotland leaving the 300-year-old union.

How did this turn of events come to be? The following chapters attempt to address that question, among others, by examining the roles played by each of the four nations in the history of Great Britain since 1688. "British" history is often told from the perspective of English actors, but when the other nations that make up Great Britain are taken into account, the story looks different. England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland often jostled one another uncomfortably—and sometimes violently—as economic, political, social, and cultural changes unfolded over three centuries. Ethnic and religious antipathies joined those of class and gender to create divisions that disrupted the conventional narrative of a "United Kingdom." The addition of empire to the mix complicates the British story even further.

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The lands that made up the British Isles in the seventeenth century—England and Wales, Scotland, and Ireland—contained a vast array of peoples who perceived no common tie among themselves beyond that of geography. Differences of language, ethnicity, culture, history, law, customs, and religion divided the kingdoms from each another. Indeed, within each kingdom, many of the inhabitants had little in common with one another. During the reign of Henry VIII (1491–1547), England had brought Wales into the administrative and political structure of England. In the twelfth century, England's Henry II (1133–1189) had conquered Ireland and rendered it a "lordship" of the English crown. "Poynings' Law" of 1494 subordinated the Irish Parliament to the English Parliament and the English crown; in 1541, Henry VIII declared himself king of Ireland and began the process of bringing the country under the administrative control of England. In a bid to secure their power in a now-Protestant state containing a Catholic population, he and Elizabeth I (1533–1603) had established "plantations" of loyal Protestant followers in Ireland, massacring Catholics, confiscating their lands, and granting them to English colonists. On Elizabeth's death in 1603, James VI (1566–1625) of Scotland succeeded her, becoming James I of England, and a Union of the Crowns left England and Scotland as sovereign states that just happened to be ruled by the same king. James continued the Tudor practice of settling colonists in Ireland, ousting Gaelic landowners in five counties in the northern reaches of Ireland and transferring the land to Scottish and English Protestants. More than 10,000 Scots ultimately came to settle there in Ulster Province.

The smallest steps toward empire building were taken during roughly the same period that England established its domination over Ireland, Wales, and Scotland. By the time that Wales became incorporated into English administration, the Venetian explorer John Cabot (c. 1450–c. 1500) had landed in Newfoundland

and claimed it for the English (1497). By 1601, when the English and Scottish crowns became united in the persons of the Stuart monarchs, the English merchant John Hawkins (1532–1595) had begun to trade in enslaved Africans with the New World (1562); Francis Drake (c. 1540–1596) had sailed around the world seeking new trading opportunities for England (1577–1580); would-be English colonists had established a settlement, subsequently abandoned, in Roanoke, Virginia (1585), a land named after their virgin queen; and Queen Elizabeth had chartered the East India Company to engage in trade with the East Indies (1600). By the time our story starts in 1688, English ships were carrying 6,700 enslaved Africans a year across the Atlantic to English colonies in the Caribbean and North America to work on the tobacco, indigo, cotton, and sugar plantations that would secure England's commercial wealth; the East India Company had set itself up in "factories"—trading stations that would become walled fortresses—in Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay; and Charles II (1630–1685) had granted the company the authority to acquire and administer more territory abroad, create and command its own military force, mint coinage, create alliances, engage in war, and make treaties. England had established dominion over its neighbors in the British Isles and was well on its way to building an empire that would make "the United Kingdom of Great Britain," once it came into being, one of the most powerful countries in the world.

Overall, the British Isles held about 9 million souls in 1688. Just under 5 million people lived in England, by far the most densely populated of the four countries. Four hundred thousand people resided in Wales at the time, 1 million in Scotland, and 2 million in Ireland. The Celtic peoples who had emerged originally in the British Isles had left little trace of their culture in England, having been absorbed by the Anglo-Saxons, Scandinavians, and Normans who had invaded the country over a number of centuries, although linguistic holdovers could be found in Cornwall and in Hereford, where Cornish and Welsh, respectively, were still spoken. Celtic culture enjoyed deep sway in the other countries, however: most people in Wales and Ireland spoke no English at all, expressing themselves in Welsh and Irish, whereas a significant portion of those in the Highlands of Scotland used Scottish Gaelic exclusively as well. Lowland Scots spoke a Germanic Scots language till well into the eighteenth century; those who immigrated to the northern areas of Ireland carried it with them to create the "Ulster Scots" dialect. English common law prevailed in England, but only nominally in Ireland and Wales, despite those countries' administrative absorption into England's administrative structures; Scotland based its system of law on the ancient Roman codes.

THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

Dramatic environmental differentiations underscored these cultural distinctions. Each country possessed topographies that differed, sometimes markedly, from one another, and within Scotland, the physical attributes of the land varied

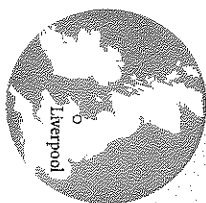
dramatically between north and south. The lands of Ireland and England tended toward rolling hills, plains, and valleys, with soil and climate conducive to good farming and good grazing. In northern England, a low line of mountains called the Pennines extended in a north-south direction from Northumberland and Yorkshire to the Midlands. The hillsides favored grazing of livestock rather than farming, and eventually these hills would yield significant amounts of coal and iron ore. Mountains comprised a large portion of Wales's geography, especially in the north, leaving much less area for farming. The soil proved poor as well, even in those areas in the south of Wales where it was less mountainous. As a result, Welsh farmers tended to use the land to grow hay rather than food for humans and to pasture their animals on it. Scotland offered the most pronounced topographical variations, with some two-thirds of the country—called the Highlands—made up of rugged, mountainous terrain transected by deep valleys. Cold, wet weather characterizes the Highlands and the rocky islands that sit offshore to the west and northeast. The Lowlands, by contrast, where half of the Scots lived in 1688, enjoys milder weather and more fertile land, even if it is hilly and sometimes boggy.

These divergent ecologies produced different ways and standards of living. The economies of the four countries revolved almost exclusively on agriculture, and the vast majority of people lived on and from the land, but huge disparities of wealth, population, and occupation distribution between and among them existed. The English enjoyed the greatest prosperity by far, having replaced a fair amount of their medieval forms of agriculture—locally based, communal, open field—with new market-oriented, capitalist farming methods and nationwide trade in the goods they produced. The gradual and uneven development of a capitalist economy had differential effects on people. As landowners began to farm their land according to more rational, efficient practices and to produce crops not only for sustenance but also to sell at market, many became prosperous; but those who had depended on common areas and nonarable acreage to grow or raise what they needed to live on could no longer provide food for their families. Many became migrants, seeking waged work where they could find it; others spun woolen thread or wove woolen cloth in their cottages in return for a wage. The enterprising individuals who circumvented guild restrictions on manufacturing and commerce in the towns by setting up these workers in rural cottages to produce cloth and paying them low wages profited nicely from the greater efficiency of domestic industry and from expanding markets. Urban guild masters, faced with competition from domestic industry as well as from increasing numbers of artisans, introduced new impediments to gaining access to their ranks, shutting down the normal avenues by means of which apprentices and journeymen and -women established themselves and made their living. By 1688, a third to a half of the English population could no longer count on the plot of ground that allowed them to establish self-sustaining households or gain entry to a craft that would enable them to become independent adults. They had become employees—men and women who worked for a wage in such areas as agriculture, the silk and linen



MAP 1.1
Great Britain and Ireland

A PLACE IN TIME

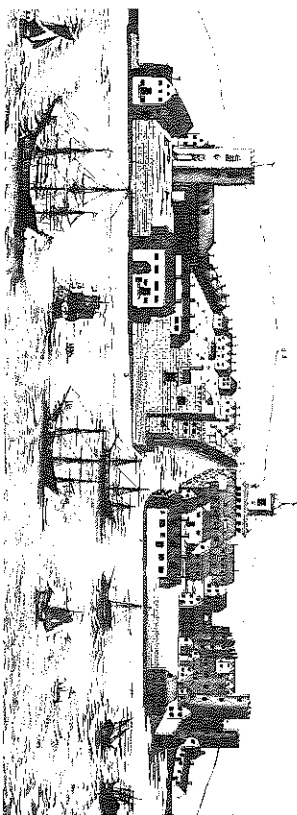
Liverpool, Second City of Empire

Although London operated as the nerve center of the United Kingdom and stood at the “heart of empire” for three centuries following 1660, a focus on Liverpool’s history offers us in many ways a more intriguing, complex, and complete picture of the dynamics that shaped and informed Great Britain between 1688 and 2015. From a sleepy town situated on the eastern bank of the Mersey River about two miles south of where it empties into the Irish Sea, Liverpool grew into one of the most vibrant commercial hubs in England. Its location at the geographical center of the British Isles gave it access to Scotland, Wales, and Ireland by sea and to the rest of England by land transport. In the seventeenth century, trade with Ireland in such commodities as linen dominated Liverpool’s economy, but the onset of trade with the American colonies, which began in the 1660s, produced a dramatic upsurge in commercial activity. Starting in 1700, Liverpool merchants began trading in slaves, a venture that brought them and the city enormous wealth and political influence; in the early nineteenth century, Liverpoolian antislavery activists helped to bring about the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and then slavery itself in 1833. Despite what amounted to panic among the city’s merchants, commerce did not suffer from abolition; in fact, trade with India increased, as did that with the United States, as newly industrialized regions of Lancashire produced a variety of commodities that held great appeal abroad. Trade with West Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly in palm oil, used to lubricate the machines of the industrial revolution and then to produce soaps and margarine, kept Liverpool merchants prosperous.

The city became a magnet for Irish, Welsh, and Scottish workers and agricultural laborers seeking a better life. Many of them went on to immigrate to the United States or the white colonies of settlement, but many stayed in the city. In 1851, 47 percent of Liverpool’s adult population hailed from other parts of Great Britain. In 1900, more Welsh people lived in Liverpool than in any Welsh city barring Cardiff; more Irish made their homes there than anywhere in Ireland apart from Dublin and Belfast; and more Scots resided in Liverpool than in Scotland with the exception of Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen. People of color from the fast-expanding empire who arrived as seamen sometimes stayed to settle and establish families in the city, but their numbers were small until after the First World War, amounting to perhaps 0.04 percent in 1900.

The Second City of Empire thus offers us a rich array of case studies with which to illustrate some of the major themes that will unfold over the following chapters. We begin in 1666, when a small ship named the *Antelope*, laden

with a cargo of linen, shoes, nails, and coal, sailed out of Liverpool bound for Barbados. It returned a year later, its hold crammed with sugarcane that sold for twice the amount merchants had paid out for the original voyage. Armed with profits of 100 percent, they outfitted more ships for trade with the West Indies; within ten years, twelve ships were making their way back and forth across the Atlantic to the Caribbean on a regular basis, while other merchants engaged in trade with Virginia. The demand for sugar from Barbados and tobacco from Virginia only increased over the next decades, and merchants and those who helped finance the trade realized handsome returns on their investments. Liverpool began to boom. From a small town of perhaps 1,000 inhabitants living in seven streets in 1660, it grew to about 7,000 people by the end of the century. Building expanded to keep pace with the increased population and the small town became a thriving borough of twenty-eight streets. Its revenues during the same period rose by more than 400 percent, from some £280 in 1662 to £1,200 in 1700.



Liverpool, c. 1680.

The families who benefitted so abundantly from the new trade with Britain’s empire in North America established themselves as the political force in Liverpool over the next number of decades, challenging and ultimately wresting power from the landed families who had governed the town and the surrounding countryside. Their wealth attracted the attention of King James II (1633–1701), who in 1684 imposed a new charter on the borough that gave him control over its affairs. This action angered the urban elites, called burghesses, most of them identified with the Whig faction of Parliament; three years later, even those who regarded themselves as Tories, or supporters of the king, joined in the alienation felt by their Whig colleagues when James interceded in a case on behalf of two Roman Catholics. By 1688, Whig and Tory burghesses alike had had enough from their monarch, whose absolutist and pro-Catholic tendencies offended them mightily. Both factions gave their enthusiastic support to James’ toppling from the throne by his son-in-law, William of Orange (1650–1702).

industries, the manufacture of soap, glass, paper, and beer, or the mining of coal, lead, tin, and copper.

About 11 percent of the English population lived in London, the thriving capital city. Only two other cities—the port town of Bristol and the manufacturing center of Norwich—could boast populations of 20,000. Another 15 percent of the population lived in market towns that dotted the countryside, but most English people lived in villages of about 300–400 people where their homes were gathered in a cluster surrounded by the fields they worked for their landlords. The 2 percent of the population that comprised the aristocracy and the gentry—some 15,000 to 20,000 families—owned most of the land, but a group of substantial nongentry landholders and farmers had emerged over time. The yeomanry, as this group was called, owned their land and farmed it themselves; they were freeholders. On the strength of their wealth, many of them could be distinguished from the gentry only by their lack of “gentle” birth—that is, they did not descend from knightly or noble families. As was the case with the aristocracy proper (whose titles of nobility were passed down only to the eldest son), the sons and daughters of the yeomanry married into the gentry, replenishing and revitalizing the landed elite.

Husbandmen farmed land they did not own but leased from the yeomanry or gentry. Over the course of the seventeenth century, increasing numbers of these people lost their land to enclosure as landlords fenced in previously available common lands and fell into the ranks of agricultural laborers, who worked other people’s land for wages, or cottagers, whose income derived from domestic manufacturing of textiles. Along with paupers, who had no source of income, cottagers made up perhaps a third of England’s population. In 1688, the statistician Gregory King (1648–1712) estimated that most people in England could not make ends meet and were judged by their contemporaries to be poor.

In English towns and cities, whose populations were growing faster than the national rate, the expansion of trade and commerce produced a group of wealthy merchants, men quite as rich as gentlemen who did not labor manually themselves but directed those who did. As their numbers grew, so did their significance and sense of importance. Independent artisans and smaller traders occupied the rung below merchants; journeymen and laborers working for wages occupied the next. In terms of civic importance, although perhaps not social status, the great merchants of London in particular joined the group of professionals in the church, the law, medicine, education, the armed forces, and government administration, whose ranks were filled by the younger sons of the aristocracy and gentry who did not inherit their fathers’ estates. In time, the sons and daughters of merchant and gentry families came to intermarry, bringing infusions of capital to struggling gentry and “gentle” social status to aspiring merchants. Some historians use the term “gentlemanly capitalism” to describe the economic, social, and political regime produced by this alliance of land and commerce after 1688.

The poor soil and mountainous terrain of Wales, combined with a lack of improvement such as was taking place in England, made for a far less developed agricultural system. The land could not support whole villages of farmers; instead, individual families worked isolated farms with primitive tools, and most agriculture was devoted to growing hay for sheep and cattle. The Welsh could barely feed themselves, let alone produce crops for the market, and most of them lived on the edge of starvation in miserable huts alongside their animals. In good times they ate bread and milk, but few could ever hope to have meat. The cottage industries that helped support English laborers did not exist in Wales, making it difficult to survive in years when crops ran short. Wales did not possess much in the way of an aristocracy, so it was the gentry who owned the land worked by the Welsh people. Often these were absentee English landlords or Welsh men and women who had become increasingly Anglicized over the seventeenth century, turning to London for economic opportunities and a social life that did not exist in Wales. They rarely returned to their ancestral homes and had lost touch with their compatriots, many of them no longer able even to speak Welsh. The assimilation of Wales into English society and politics, involving exclusively the upper ranks of the Welsh, was virtually complete in 1688.

Scotland could well have been taken for two separate countries, so vast were the differences between the lands and the peoples of the Highlands and the Lowlands. Lowland Scots, inhabiting a third of the land, comprised half of the total population of the country. Most of them—tenant farmers, farmers who leased from tenants (called “crofters” and “cottars”), farm laborers, and servants—lived in small, isolated hamlets called “farmtowns,” made up usually of a single farm big enough to require a plow to till the land, which produced mostly grain and not a great deal of that, given the unimproved nature of farming. The land was owned exclusively by aristocrats or members of the gentry, called “lairds”; they felt little compulsion to adopt any of the agricultural reforms being tried out in England. Cattle, which made up the bulk of Scottish agriculture and commerce, needed little more than pasturage. Peasants mostly ate oatmeal washed down with milk; cheese and butter made up the rest of their diet. Like the Welsh, they lived in squalid huts.

Scottish urban areas (“burghs”) compared poorly with those of England. Some 300 small towns of about 100 people were sprinkled across the countryside. Edinburgh, the capital, contained a sizeable population of 30,000 people, and about 10,000 people lived in the cities of Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Dundee. These commercial centers traded cattle, sheep, and fish products to France and the countries of northern Europe for iron, timber, and manufactured goods. The cattle trade with England in particular provided a good source of income for those merchants who could take advantage of it.

As bad as things were for most Lowland Scots, they were worse in the Highlands. The fertile grain-growing areas of the Lowlands did not exist in the Highlands, which had to import most of its grain from the south. Highlanders raised cattle and lived hand to mouth, most of them, in the deep valleys (called “straths”)

between the mountain ridges that characterized the area. They organized themselves by clan, groups that claimed kinship with one another, and fought endless pitched battles over cattle, the sign and source of wealth in the Highlands. Bloody feuds, especially those between the families of the Campbells and the Macdonalds, each of which sought to gain dominance over the Highlands, sometimes reached the level of civil war. Lowland Scots regarded the Highlanders with a combination of disdain and terror: the former on account of the "uncivilized" nature of the clans; the latter rising to the fore when Highlander raids on cattle crossed into their territory. The government at Edinburgh tried hard to rein in what they saw as the lawlessness of the clans through "Letters of Fire and Sword," decrees that authorized individuals to take whatever steps necessary to bring the wrongdoers to justice, without having to worry about any criminal ramifications of their actions.

Ireland enjoyed only a bit more prosperity than Scotland in 1688, a surprising fact given the natural gifts of climate and fertility the country possessed. The great majority of the population, living almost entirely in rural areas (Dublin could boast a population of 60,000 in 1675, but Cork, Limerick, Waterford, and Galway had less than 5,000 people each), faced starvation on a regular basis. Their diet consisted of milk, cakes made of oats, and potatoes, which had been introduced in the late 1500s from the Americas by Spanish fishermen who dried their catch on the western coast of the island. The tuber quickly became a mainstay. Irish peasants worked the unimproved fields of their landlords with rudimentary tools, eking out a barely sustainable existence in the good years. In the bad years, which occurred with frequency in the second half of the seventeenth century, peasants died in large numbers.

Blessed with a moderate climate, plenty of rain, and green rolling plains, Ireland should have been able not only to feed its people but also to prosper, much like England. That it did not in 1688 reflects the intense divisions that plagued the country. Seventy-five percent of the Irish people worshipped as Catholics; they lived predominantly in the provinces of Leinster, Munster, and Connacht, where they made up 95 percent of the population. The remaining 25 percent counted themselves Protestant, either Anglican (the established Church of England and of Ireland) or Presbyterian, whose differences we will discuss later in this chapter. Protestants comprised half the population in Ulster Province, and probably half of those were Presbyterian. Presbyterians tended to descend from the Scots who had immigrated to northern Ireland in the earlier part of the seventeenth century and Anglicans from the English who had been planted in Ireland since Henry VIII's time. The Catholics of Ireland came from the original Gaelic population and the descendants of Norman conquerors.

Landholding tended to follow the religious divide. Most landowners were Protestant, having gained their estates through the forcible and violent confiscation of Irish Catholic property. Almost 80 percent of the land was owned by Protestants. In contrast, most of those who worked the land were Catholic, some of whom had once owned the property they now had to lease from their hated landlords. Thus, economic and political power was inextricably entwined with

religious divisions, to the benefit of Protestants. Some dispossessed Catholics turned to banditry as a way to express their rage and rebellion against Protestants. Landlords often found themselves isolated in a sea of hostile Catholics who spoke a language they could not understand and harbored long-standing and deep-seated resentments. They had little incentive to try to improve agriculture or better the conditions of their angry tenants.

The province of Ulster proved the exception to this rule. There, Presbyterian landowners worked to bring agriculture into the capitalist system, growing food for market and increasing their output wherever they could. They invigorated the cattle trade and raised sheep and grew flax for woolen and linen manufacture, respectively. Ulster prosperity facilitated the growth of towns there, as did a regular flow of goods, ideas, and people between the northern counties of Ireland and Lowland Scotland, a mere thirteen miles away across the Irish Sea.

OVERSEAS COLONIES

England's considerable wealth advantage owed much to its overseas trade with its colonies in the New World and with countries in the East, especially India. The English overseas empire of the late seventeenth century consisted of holdings in North America and the West Indies, where some 105,000 British Americans lived in the 1660s. The nature of these possessions varied greatly. Most of those in Canada were in the hands of private commercial companies and ranged from a line of fishing ports in Newfoundland to a motley collection of forts in northern Canada operated by the Hudson's Bay Company for the purposes of trading in furs. Colonies south of Canada had been established by religious refugees (Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island) or individuals granted royal charters by Charles I (1600–1649) and Charles II (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, the Carolinas). Only two colonies—New Hampshire and Virginia—actually "belonged" to the monarch. Bermuda and the colonies of the Caribbean (Jamaica, Barbados, the Leeward Islands) fell under direct royal authority, but here, as in North America, the colonies established legislatures through which they governed themselves. The governors appointed by the monarch to rule the colonies enjoyed freedom to govern as they saw fit, since England was some eight weeks away by ship. At the same time, legislatures frequently reminded them of how little power they actually possessed.

In the economic scheme of things, the mainland colonies of seventeenth-century North America contributed little to England's overall wealth. Apart from tobacco and furs (over which the Hudson's Bay Company had a monopoly), there was virtually no demand for products from North America. The Caribbean colonies, on the other hand, turned vast profits in the sugar trade, whose success was powered by a continuous supply of enslaved Africans. Thousands of captives were carried across the Atlantic each year to provide the labor that would undergird the British imperial economy; from 1660 on, they would outnumber white Britons, more dramatically as each year passed.

England protected its economic interests in the New World through a series of Navigation Acts that stipulated that only English ships could trade with its colonies. Scottish and Irish merchants could not themselves trade directly with England's colonies, nor could they gain entry to the two other chartered companies, the East India Company and the Royal African Company, which enjoyed monopolies on trade with South Asia and Africa, respectively, and provided handsome returns for their investors.

A GREAT CHAIN OF BEING

Virtually all Britons, no matter where they resided, understood the world in which they lived to be fundamentally, properly, and irrevocably hierarchical. They imagined their social order to be a "great chain of being," with God the Father and the angels at the top, followed in descending order by monarchs, aristocrats, gentry, and everyone else. Women held their various positions on the chain by virtue of their relationship to men as wives or daughters; as women, they were inferior and subordinate to men, as God had demonstrated in making Eve out of Adam's rib. Moreover, Eve's transgressions had stained all women with her sin. Construed as insatiably lustful, with sexual appetites equal to or greater than men's, women of the seventeenth century were perceived to be potential agents of damnation and destruction, requiring the mastery of men to preserve their propriety and honor and even the stability of the social order itself.

Hierarchies of gender mirrored those of status based on landownership in rural areas and on guild structures in the towns. Just as subjects of the crown knew themselves to be subordinate to their monarch, farmers knew themselves to be fully subordinate to their landlords, and apprentices and journeymen and -women to their guild masters, so too women understood themselves to be subordinate to their fathers and their husbands. Patriarchal rule—whether it be of master to man or man to woman—prevailed.

Patriarchy in state and society as well as in the family rested on the ancient presumption that the male head of household held property not only in his land and his animals, but also in his wife and his children. That property was to be handed down to the eldest son, part of the inheritance system known as primogeniture. Although never legally classified as chattel—property—of men, married English, Welsh, and Scottish women faced restrictions in common law that rendered them, for all intents and purposes, the property of their husbands. At the very least, common law doctrines institutionalized the inferiority and subordination of women to men. Under the law of coverture (unique to England), married women had no legal existence apart from their husbands: they had no legal rights to property, to earnings, to freedom of movement, to conscience, to their bodies, or to their children; all belonged to their husbands. They could not sign contracts, sue or be sued, except under their husbands' names, and if they incurred debt were not legally responsible for it. If a woman was raped, the crime was perceived as a form of theft, not from her, but from her husband or male

relatives; cases of adultery were prosecuted only in those instances where the woman involved was married. Women lost their names when they married. All of these circumstances combined to suggest that women were the property of men in fact, if not in law. Certainly they meant that women did not enjoy the autonomy and independence that were vital prerequisites for formal political participation (which, indeed, most men did not possess either, although not because they were excluded by law). Only in rare and exceptional cases did individual women vote for or hold public office. In the Gaelic areas of Ireland where English common law could not overcome traditional medieval legal practices, married women may well have enjoyed a higher legal status and greater property rights. Gaelic women, it appears, could hold property and administer it as they saw fit, independent of their husbands.

In practice, the facts of demography and the need to ensure the survival of all members of the family tended to militate against the inheritance and legal disabilities that English, Welsh, and Scottish women, daughters, and younger sons experienced under common law. First, because death rates were so high and life expectancy so low compared to that in the twenty-first century, the inheritance patterns and legal disabilities enshrined in common law often did not come to pass as expected. Some 40 percent of marriages never produced a son. In the 20 percent of marriages that produced only daughters, they would inherit land jointly from their father. Even when marriages produced a son, more often than not he would not be of age at the time of his father's death; thus, the inheritance would, for some time at least, pass into the hands of his mother to be administered by her until he turned twenty-one. Because married women regained their own legal identity on the death of their husbands, mothers negotiated their children's marriage agreements as often as did fathers.

Perhaps most important, the survival of individuals in the seventeenth century depended on the survival of the entire family; women's material contribution to the family economy made the difference between life and death. New households could not be established until couples had obtained the necessary financial resources to sustain themselves and the children they expected to have—the availability of a plot of land or a cottage, the completion of artisanal training, the inheritance of a marriage portion. Wives were expected to bring to the marriage a dowry, also called a marriage portion, equal to the contribution that their husbands made. Fathers, aware that the most significant component of wealth consisted of an inheritance, tried to ensure that the inheritances they left their children were equal and sufficient for them to marry and set up households; what the eldest son received in land was often matched in value by the moveable household goods left to the other children, although those children had no legal claim on them and were at the mercy of their fathers' goodwill.

A lease to a cottage, a cow, a bed, clothing, utensils, tools—the inheritance of these items made it possible for daughters and younger sons to marry and set up independent households. They were not usually able to do so until relatively late in their life; men of ordinary rank married in their late twenties and women in

their mid- to late twenties. Amongst the aristocracy, for whom marriage constituted a kind of alliance between powerful families, or the gentry, for whom it was the means by which economic, social, and political interests were furthered, women and men married earlier, some as early as their mid-teens. They did not have to wait to amass the resources necessary to establish separate households.

The household was the site of economic activity. Whether it was a farm or an artisanal workshop, work and family were never separated. The family economy characteristic of early modern society depended on the labor of all members of the household; marriage was above all an economic partnership. Within this economic enterprise, clearly demarcated spheres of activity for men and women provided the gender boundaries that ordered everyday life. In rural areas, men worked in the fields, free to travel fairly long distances from the household to farm and to labor for long, undisturbed periods of time. Women tended to do work that was located closer to the house so that the constant interruptions of small children and the necessities of running a household could be accommodated. They looked after the raising of livestock, dairying, brewing, baking, and cultivation of vegetable gardens. Women sold the dairy and vegetable products at market and managed whatever household cash income there might be at their disposal. This gendered division of labor prevailed at all social levels, although in the case of the gentry and aristocracy, wives supervised rather than undertook these activities themselves.

In urban areas and those parts of the countryside where artisanal manufacturing thrived, wives in workshops and small shops proved indispensable to the family economy. They sold the products of the workshop and provided for the needs of both family members and apprentices, who lived with the family as part of their apprenticeship agreement. In those families that depended primarily on wages to survive, marriage age could be earlier because the material prerequisites for setting up a household did not require waiting for a plot of land or a position in a workshop to become available. Among gentry, where neither husband nor wife worked, both nevertheless had to coordinate their efforts to oversee the management of the estates and to protect the interests of the family. In law and in custom, women were certainly the subordinate, inferior sex. In practice, their contributions to the family enterprise and the management of whatever cash income came in, without which the family could not survive, provided them with economic leverage.

But it is also the case that the material and emotional lives of men and women unfolded within a system of beliefs and values about the natures and roles of their respective sexes that helped people to make sense of their world and to give it order. This web of ideas, although it might not correspond to the ways individual men and women actually behaved or thought, did nonetheless act both to offer possibilities about and to circumscribe the ways individuals could imagine they could live. For example, the belief that women were inherently sexual creatures made it imaginatively possible for women to enjoy sexual intercourse; this belief also allowed religious thinkers to recognize that the satisfaction of sexual desire

was one of the purposes of marriage, and it also underpinned received medical wisdom that conception—the primary function of marriage—could only occur if both partners experienced orgasm. On the other hand, the sexuality of women could also be construed to cause all sorts of disorder and to render them unfit for any kind of autonomy. The subordination and inferiority of women that was so central to seventeenth-century social, political, economic, and familial organization owed its prevalence in large part to ideas about women's sexual nature. Those ideas prescribed proper and improper behavior for women and thus helped to delimit their activity.

Regardless of social class, women were expected to stay within the confines of the home, the realm of “within,” as some ministers put it, as opposed to the world “without.” Literature intended to instruct women as to what was proper enjoined them to keep themselves within the private sphere of home and family where they could best cultivate and exhibit the qualities of respectable women. As we have seen, ordinary women did venture out of the private sphere to work their gardens, tend their livestock, and sell their goods at market; the wives of middling artisan households engaged in commercial activity from their front rooms. (They did not, however, join their husbands in the alehouse, where most lower- and middle-ranking men spent their leisure hours.) Upper-class women traveled for business and pleasure and some for education, which they could not obtain from the grammar schools and universities attended by their brothers. These out-of-doors activities violated norms of female behavior, but at the same time women's recognized obligations to contribute to the family economy necessitated these transgressions. This contradiction left women in a potentially precarious state: any misstep outside their prescribed private sphere could incite the disapprobation of society. Few proper women were prepared to risk the displeasure of their communities, and displayed, at least in public, the traditional virtues assigned to them.

Proper women were expected to be modest, humble, obedient, pious, temperate, patient, silent, and above all, chaste. This is not to say that they were all of these things; indeed, the very need to enjoin them to be so may suggest that they were not. Most likely, however, once these norms of femininity became accepted as part of the “natural” order, as was the case by 1600, it would be difficult for women to transgress them with impunity. To do so would be to call down on their heads charges of immorality and unnaturalness, which most people could not have afforded. Observations that women did not enjoy the same legal, educational, or political privileges as men were likely to provoke outrage, culminating in diagnoses of insanity.

Most women accepted and internalized the religious and scientific discourses that proclaimed their inferiority and need for subordination. Educated women, a tiny minority, might be even more likely to subscribe to prevailing doctrines concerning femininity: they would have read the learned treatises that credited the humors with causing the differences between men and women on which women's subordination was based. Ordinary women would not have read the conduct books or scientific treatises that proclaimed their inferiority and subordination.

They would, however, have listened almost every Sunday to sermons that preached the same ideas. They embraced church teachings about their intellectual defects and their exclusion from the masculine domains of politics and learning as part of the religious doctrine that offered them the only source of solace in a harsh and horrific world that carried their children away from them on a regular basis.

THE SECTARIAN DIVIDE

Religion informed the lives of the peoples of England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and British colonies in the New World to a degree difficult for us to fathom today. Following the proper religion, as contemporaries saw it, amounted to a matter of life or death, quite literally. From the time of the Protestant Reformation on, worshippers could not agree what that proper religion should be, causing extraordinarily violent upheavals across the British Isles. Ireland provides only the best-known example of religious strife in the Catholic/Protestant divide that would plague the country for the next four centuries. Splits within Protestantism itself also brought about terrible conflicts in all of the kingdoms, as dissenters broke away from the established Church of England and formed themselves into congregations of Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Quakers, Unitarians, and other sects. Their contests involved not only—or even especially—theological issues, but also political and economic ones, as we have seen in the case of Ireland.

When Henry VIII broke with the Roman Catholic church in 1543 to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, and marry Anne Boleyn (1501–1536), he did little to change either the doctrine or the structure of the English church. Instead, he placed himself, rather than the pope, at the head of what was now called the Anglican church, or the Church of England, retaining the ecclesiastical structure of archbishops and bishops presiding over the dioceses of the country. The Anglican church regarded the monarch as its “supreme governor,” followed a great deal of the traditional Roman Catholic liturgy, and barely altered the doctrines concerning the sacraments. Like the Roman Catholic church, the Church of England regarded itself as the instrument through which God communicated with individual worshippers.

This kind of reformation did not satisfy many Protestants who embraced the doctrines of continental reformers like John Calvin or Ulrich Zwingli, or the Scottish Calvinist, John Knox (c. 1514–1572). They wished to see a purer church emerge from the Reformation, believing that no intermediary should insert himself between the individual and God. Called Puritans, they sought scriptures that regular men and women could read for themselves instead of relying on priests for their interpretation and championed a simpler liturgy and a more strict moral life. They eschewed the pageantry and grandeur of the Anglican clergy, dressing instead in plain black clothing and foregoing what they regarded as the “idolatory” of decoration and the worship of saints. Within the Puritan fold, two different groups emerged, largely determined by the way they believed the church should

be organized and governed. Presbyterians looked to replace the hierarchical ecclesiastical structure of bishops and archbishops with councils—presbyteries—made up of ministers and laymen as the means of governance; Independents went even farther than Presbyterians, placing authority for governance within the individual congregations themselves. These Independents would come to be called Congregationalists in the lands of the New World.

England contained only a few Catholics in the seventeenth century, most of them living in the north and northeast of the country. Most of the aristocracy and gentry belonged to the Church of England. Puritan strongholds tended to exist in the cities, especially among merchant and financial families. The Welsh gentry embraced Anglicanism, whereas the rest of the population of Wales seemed not to care one way or the other. Elizabeth had made sure to appoint Welshmen to the bishoprics of the country and to translate the bible and the book of prayer into Welsh, a circumstance that both preserved the Welsh language in the long run and kept Wales loyal to Protestantism. In Scotland, the divisions of the Highlands and the Lowlands tended to include religion, with the Lowland Scots fervently committing to Presbyterianism and the Highland Scots either retaining their Catholicism or becoming somewhat lukewarm adherents of the Anglican church. Ireland, as we have seen, remained overwhelmingly Catholic, ruled over by a minority Protestant landowning elite.

In the colonies of the New World, “dissenters” enjoyed greater room to maneuver than in England. The New England colonies had been founded by Puritans seeking relief from persecution in England in the early seventeenth century; the middle colonies of New York and Pennsylvania, initially settled by Anglicans, received significant in-migration of Scots Irish Protestants from Ulster. The presence of Catholics in New France, north of New England, prompted a good deal of anti-Catholic sentiment. Catholics had also settled in Maryland, where Lord Baltimore had established a proprietorial colony during the reign of Charles I designed to provide religious toleration for Catholics in the New World. The West Indian planter class tended to embrace Anglicanism, although the Irish indentured servants who came over and worked for them would have been Catholic.

Jews had been banished from the kingdom by King Edward I (1239–1307) in 1290, but some returned in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as converted New Christians. Few in London had any illusions about the sincerity of their faith, but they did not go out of their way to molest the *conversos*, as they were called. In the 1650s, after fundamentalist Puritans urged that Jews be readmitted to Britain so that they could be converted to Christianity in advance of the second coming of Christ, an openly professing Jewish community tolerated by the government emerged in London.

POLITICS

During the first half of the seventeenth century, British politics had been consumed by debates and then armed conflict over the question of the relationship

of the monarchy to Parliament. Royalists believed that the power of the monarch over his or her subjects should always prevail over that of the elites represented in Parliament. Parliamentarians, as their name suggests, argued that their rights to rule should, when push came to shove, predominate. The political fight was informed and exacerbated by religious divisions. Although they did not always break down so neatly, generally speaking, royalists, at least in England, tended to be Anglicans (and sometimes secret Catholics); parliamentarians tended to embrace one of the dissenting sects. In 1660, following twenty tumultuous years of civil war and revolution that involved the beheading of a king, military conquest of Ireland and Scotland, the creation of a republican form of government, and the abolition of the Church of England and of Parliament, English elites asked Charles II to return to the throne. The restoration of the monarchy included, perforce, that of the Church of England as well, an act that had serious repercussions for dissenting and nonconformist congregations. Charles's failed attempts to impose toleration for Catholics and nonconforming Protestants through royal prerogative did little to soften the persecution against those who refused to swear an oath to the Anglican church. Religion continued to play a central role in questions of governance, especially because people suspected that Charles, having spent his formative years in the royal court of France, had come to embrace Catholicism, if only in the privacy of his own quarters. Charles's brother, James, openly practiced Catholicism, creating anxiety and consternation among the political classes of England.

In the late 1670s and early 1680s, Charles's inability to produce an heir and fears of a popish plot to assassinate Charles and place his brother James on the throne provoked debates about the relationship of the king and his subjects. Led by the Earl of Shaftesbury (1621–1683), a coalition of members of Parliament, who came to be called Whigs, organized in 1679 a campaign to exclude the Catholic James from the throne. Charles responded to the so-called exclusion crisis by dissolving Parliament that summer; when he called two others, in 1680 and 1681, he found no way of compromising with the intransigent and increasingly inflammatory Whigs and did not summon another Parliament for the duration of his reign. The violent threats of the Whigs, who arrived armed at the parliamentary session of 1681, provoked a reaction in favor of Charles and James from people who feared another civil war. The king's supporters, called Tories, rallied to his efforts to remove Shaftesbury and other Whigs from local positions of power and gave James their unwavering loyalty.

James ascended the throne in 1685. Because he had no son to succeed him and because both of his daughters by his first wife, Mary (1662–1694) and Anne (1665–1714), were committed Protestants, James was perceived to pose no permanent threat to the Protestant nation. Eager to prevent any recurrence of another civil war, even Whigs swallowed their fears and agreed to let things take their course, confident that a Protestant succession would follow on James's death. But then, in January 1688, the court announced that James's wife of fifteen years, Mary of Modena (1658–1718), was pregnant, shocking all of James's

subjects. The potential of a Catholic heir now loomed ominously, compelling a group of Tory and Whig leaders to bury their political differences at the prospect of an unlimited Catholic line of succession if the baby were to be a boy. They began to hatch a plan to invite William, Prince of Orange, the husband of the Protestant Mary, to invade England and secure the line of succession for his wife. At the same time, rumors that the queen's pregnancy was fraudulent began to circulate, claiming that her "great belly" was fake. In what became known as the warning pan scandal of 1688, Queen Mary was accused of having had her newborn son smuggled into her bedchamber in a warning pan rather than having given birth to him herself.

The Prince of Wales's birth provided a powerful justification for William's invasion of England, allowing him to defend the hereditary rights of his wife Mary to succession. As he asserted in his 1688 *Declaration . . . of the Reasons Inducing Him to Appear in Arms in the Kingdom of England*, "the just and visible grounds of suspicion [that] the Pretended Prince of Wales was not born by the Queen" compelled him to act.¹ As we shall see in the next chapter, the Glorious Revolution set off by the birth of a Catholic heir to the throne would have momentous consequences for all of the lands encompassed by the British empire.

Differences of politics, religion, wealth, economy, law, gender, ethnicity, and social structure characterized the four nations that comprised Great Britain in 1688. These were not equal lands or peoples. Rather, England dominated the others to varying degrees and the uneven nature of the relationships among the constituent countries and among and between their peoples provoked a great deal of struggle over the next three centuries. Indeed, Irish Catholics, and to a lesser extent Scottish Highlanders, felt themselves to be in a colonial position vis-à-vis England. In the actual colonies of North America and the Caribbean, English power in the guise of the law, merchants, and settlers prevailed, although over the course of the next two centuries empire would provide one of the only means by which a cohesive "Britishness" can be said to have existed.

NOTE

1. From Robert Beddard, ed., *A Kingdom without a King: The Journal of the Provisional Government in the Revolution of 1688* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 124–28; 145–49.