

SCOTLAND, ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND AND THE IDEA OF BRITAIN

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ABSTRACT. This paper explores aspects of Anglo-Scottish relations in Elizabeth's reign with particular emphasis on the idea of dynastic union and the creation of a Protestant British kingdom. It begins by examining the legacy of pre-Elizabethan ideas of Britain and the extent to which Elizabeth and her government sought to realise the vision of a Protestant and imperial British kingdom first articulated in the late 1540s. It then focuses on the issues arising from the deposition of Mary Queen of Scots and her long captivity in England. The dynastic implications of Mary's execution in 1587 are highlighted and it is argued that Elizabeth's policy towards James VI and Scotland betrays little or no interest in developing a truly British agenda.

It is probably not in the best of taste, on an occasion such as this, to introduce to the proceedings such an unwelcome guest as Mary Queen of Scots. Yet no commemoration of Elizabeth and Elizabethan England would be complete without the haunting spectre of the Tudor queen's cousin, dynastic rival and near-nemesis. Certainly no consideration of contemporary Anglo-Scottish relations and the idea of a united British kingdom can afford to ignore her. For nearly three decades, two-thirds of Elizabeth's forty-five-year reign, Mary Stewart not only cast a threatening shadow over the Elizabethan regime but also hugely complicated English attitudes to Scotland and Scottish attitudes to England. Mary's execution on 8 February 1587, despite the history of indecision that lay behind it, proved in the end a decisive moment in the dynastic history of both England and Scotland, opening the way for the succession of James VI to the English throne and the creation in 1603 of an imperial British monarchy. What follows is largely concerned with Scottish attitudes to the Elizabethan regime and Elizabethan attitudes to Mary, James and the future of Britain. First, however, it is as well to consider some of the background to the issue of Anglo-Scottish union and the ideological antecedents of the idea of Britain itself.¹

¹ The paper thus revisits themes first explored in R. A. Mason, 'The Scottish Reformation and the Origins of Anglo-British Imperialism', in *Scots and Britons: Scottish Political Thought and the Union of 1603*, ed. R. A. Mason (Cambridge, 1994), 161–86, reprinted in R. A. Mason,

From a Scottish and, signally, a British perspective, 1603 is a date whose resonances are profound and far-reaching. So profound and far-reaching, indeed, that it seems astonishing that, in 2003, we should be memorialising Elizabethan England rather than celebrating Jacobean Britain. To be sure, the emphasis of this conference is on Elizabeth and the wider world, or at any rate the expansion of England, and there is clearly a sense in which 1603 was – and perhaps still is – viewed simply as the absorption of Scotland into an expanding English imperial system.² But there are obvious problems with such a view. After all, leaving the shambles of Ireland aside, Elizabethan expansionism amounted to little more than a failed North American colony and some (admittedly spectacular) piracy and free enterprise overseas trade and exploration. In fact, Elizabeth's greatest contribution to the expansion of England was to die, unmarried and childless. It was the Stewart succession that led to a substantial extension of the English (or, as James VI insisted, British) crown's dominions, and it was in the reigns of James VI and I and his successors that the real foundations of overseas empire were laid.³ In so far as England expanded at all in Elizabeth's reign, it was not territorially, but in terms of self-knowledge and awareness. The last decades of the sixteenth century witnessed a remarkable cultural renaissance that, *inter alia*, saw the creation and enrichment of multiple, over-lapping and often contradictory English religious, political and legal identities.⁴ There is no little irony in the fact that the final realisation of England's long-looked-for hegemony over mainland Britain was brought about by the accession of a Scottish king whose fanciful notions of a new British monarchy threatened actually to un-English the English. It is perhaps not surprising that the myth of an Elizabethan golden age – a quintessentially *English* golden age – developed so quickly and proved so resilient.⁵ In 1603, English self-perceptions were rudely challenged, first, by the accession of a Scot to the throne of England, and, second, by the deliberate promotion of ideas

Kingship and the Commonwealth: Political Thought in Renaissance and Reformation Scotland (East Linton, 1998), 242–69.

² A. L. Rowse's *The Expansion of Elizabethan England* (1955), from which this conference derived its title, is as much concerned with the expansion of Elizabethan civilisation into England's Celtic fringes – 'in various stages of deliquescence, decay and regeneration' (p. 3) – as it is with overseas expansion. In Rowse's view, however, the latter was clearly an extension of the former.

³ See generally *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, I: *The Origins of Empire*, ed. N. Canny (Oxford, 1998).

⁴ See A. L. Rowse, *The England of Elizabeth* (1951), ch. 2: 'The Elizabethan Discovery of England'; and for a more recent (and less fervently patriotic) treatment, R. Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago and London, 1992).

⁵ The literature on this theme is reviewed and extended in *The Myth of Elizabeth*, ed. S. Doran and T. S. Freeman (Basingstoke, 2003).

of Britain that did not necessarily sit comfortably with how the English viewed themselves and their role in the world.⁶

Needless to say, 1603 confronted the Scots too with challenges to their self-perceptions and esteem. The union of the crowns brought them into an uncomfortably close relationship with the 'auld enemy', while James VI and I's British agenda had implications for the northern kingdom that were, if anything, even more threatening to Scotland's historic identity than they were to England's. Yet the Scots were perhaps better prepared to meet these challenges. They had experience enough of being, as it were, in bed with an elephant; and, if the first half of the sixteenth century had taught them anything new about their relationship with England, it was that when the elephant got its act together, as it did briefly in the 'Rough Wooing' of the 1540s, its superior weight could be brought to bear on Scotland with devastating effect.⁷ Neither Henry VIII nor Protector Somerset was able to bring the Scots to heel; nevertheless, they had made England's superiority in terms of manpower and money abundantly clear. At the same time, they had revitalised claims to feudal superiority over the Scottish kingdom – claims that relegated the Scottish crown to a mere dependency of its English counterpart – that the Scots had had to contend with for centuries. Indeed, it was precisely the belief that they owed no allegiance to the English crown – that they were not in any sense English – that lay at the heart of the Scots sense of themselves as Scots.⁸ Part of the success of the Stewart dynasty – and, whatever their manifold individual inadequacies, as a dynasty the Stewarts were phenomenally successful – lay in their willingness to identify themselves as the upholders and defenders of Scottish autonomy in the face of English aggression. It was no accident that a succession of Stewart monarchs, from James III to James V, sought to project an image of themselves as emperors within their own kingdom, wielding supreme jurisdiction within the bounds of their realm and, crucially, recognising the supremacy of no external jurisdiction.⁹ When James IV married Margaret Tudor in 1503, he did so as an imperial monarch whose status, lineage and legitimacy – at least

⁶ B. Galloway, *The Union of England and Scotland, 1603–1608* (Edinburgh, 1986); B. Levack, *The Formation of the British State: England, Scotland and the Union, 1603–1707* (Oxford, 1987); J. Wormald, 'James VI, James I and the Identity of Britain', in *The British Problem, c. 1534–1707: State Formation in the Atlantic Archipelago*, ed. B. Bradshaw and J. Morrill (Basingstoke, 1996), 148–71; A. I. Macinnes, 'Regal Union for Britain, 1603–38', in *The New British History: Founding a Modern State, 1603–1715*, ed. G. Burgess (London and New York, 1999), 33–64.

⁷ M. Merriman, *The Rough Wooings: Mary Queen of Scots, 1542–1551* (East Linton, 2000).

⁸ R. A. Mason, 'Scotching the Brut: Politics, History and National Myth in Sixteenth-Century Britain', in *Scotland and England, 1286–1815*, ed. R. A. Mason (Edinburgh, 1987), 60–84; Mason, *Kingship and the Commonwealth*, 78–103.

⁹ R. A. Mason, 'This Realm of Scotland Is an Empire? Imperial Ideas and Iconography in Early Renaissance Scotland', in *Church, Chronicle and Learning in Medieval and Early Renaissance Scotland*, ed. B. E. Crawford (Edinburgh, 1999), 73–91.

in his own estimation – far exceeded that of his upstart and usurping father-in-law. Stewart monarchs had a bad habit of over-estimating their power and authority; but historians must be wary of under-estimating their ambition. In James's eyes, in marrying Margaret Tudor he was doing Henry VII a favour (not vice versa), lending the Tudor monarchy further legitimacy while at the same time positioning the Stewart dynasty in the English succession. James IV might well have agreed with Henry VII's alleged comment on the possibility of dynastic union that the greater would draw the lesser, but he would have seen such a union as an extension of the Stewart not the Tudor *imperium*.¹⁰

But the imperial pretensions of the Scottish monarchy reached their high point, not under James IV, but in the latter half of the 1530s, in the reign of his son and successor, James V.¹¹ No doubt this was partly inspired by Henry VIII's break with Rome and the ringing assertion that 'this realm of England is an empire' on which Henrician caesaropapalism was founded. James V was as attracted as his uncle by the potential dividends to be derived from pursuing imperial ideas to their logical conclusion and asserting royal supremacy over the church. However, James was able to have his cake and eat it – at least temporarily. That is, he gained massive financial concessions from the papacy without having to break with Rome, while at the same time pulling off a stunning dynastic coup by marrying a Valois princess, thus simultaneously reaffirming both Scotland's 'auld alliance' with France and its independence of England. It was in this context, in the afterglow of a lengthy sojourn at the French court of Francis I, that James's almost obsessive interest in the iconography of empire flourished most luxuriantly. That the Stewart monarchy was an imperial monarchy – that the realm of Scotland was an empire – was proclaimed as never before in royal architecture, on royal seals, on the coinage and in the definitive reconstruction of the Scottish crown itself as an arched or closed imperial one. Such dizzying self-confidence was

¹⁰ N. Macdougall, *James IV* (Edinburgh, 1989), 248ff. It is worth noting that, in October 1509, shortly after Henry VIII's accession to the English throne, Margaret Tudor bore James IV a son who was baptised Arthur – presumably a conscious recollection of the new English king's deceased elder brother, but surely also indicative of the Stewart king's British ambitions. The baby died within a year, but significantly James V was also to baptise his second legitimate male heir, Arthur, in April 1541 (he died the same month). *Handbook of British Chronology*, ed. E. B. Fryde et al., 3rd edn (1986), 60–1.

¹¹ For what follows, see Mason, 'This Realm of Scotland Is an Empire?'. James V's reign is undergoing major scholarly revision and the views presented in standard works such as G. Donaldson, *Scotland: James V – James VII* (Edinburgh, 1965), ch. 4, are now largely untenable. See rather J. Cameron, *James V: The Personal Rule, 1528–42* (East Linton, 1998); C. Edington, *Court and Culture in Renaissance Scotland: Sir David Lindsay of the Mount* (Amherst, 1994); *Stewart Style, 1513–42: Essays on the Court of James V*, ed. J. H. Williams (East Linton, 1996); and A. Thomas, 'Renaissance Culture at the Court of James V' (Ph.D. thesis, Edinburgh University, 1997).

perhaps misplaced. Yet the death of James V, aged barely thirty, was no more the result of hubris than it was of a broken royal will or a broken royal heart. It was neither military defeat at the hands of the English at Solway Moss in November 1542 nor the death of his two legitimate male heirs the previous year that killed the young king. Much more prosaically, it was plague or cholera that took his life on 14 December 1542, leaving the Stewart dynasty hanging by the frail thread of his sole legitimate heir, Mary, born less than a week before.¹²

It hardly needs saying that, while the succession of an infant female precipitated a major and enduring crisis for the Stewart dynasty and the Scottish kingdom, it presented Henry VIII with an unexpected opportunity to solve England's Scottish 'problem' once and for all. The betrothal of the young Queen of Scots to his own son and heir, Prince Edward, promised to effect a dynastic union that would extend Tudor hegemony throughout the British mainland, while allowing Henry to pursue the far more interesting prospect of war with France.¹³ Yet Henry's aggressive pursuit of his objectives served only to alienate even those Scots who were sympathetic to Anglo-Scottish friendship and unity. It is hard now to tell how strong the Scottish unionist lobby actually was, but the case for dynastic union had been powerfully articulated in 1521 by John Mair or Major of Haddington, best known as a highly influential Parisian theologian and philosopher, but also the author of a Latin *History of Greater Britain* that has the distinction of being the first printed work in which the case for Anglo-Scottish union was set out at any length.¹⁴ Mair duly emphasised the geographical logic, as well as the commonality of language and custom, that made the existence of two separate kingdoms within one island seem so anomalous. At the same time, however, he argued that any union between them must be based on parity of status and esteem. Whatever the inequalities of wealth, population and resources, a union founded on English assumptions of feudal and cultural superiority would prove unacceptable to Scots who, like Mair himself, were intensely proud of their ancestors' successful struggle to maintain the Scottish kingdom's independence of England. To some extent, these preoccupations surface in the treaties of Greenwich of 1543 through which Henry's desire for union appeared on the point of being realised. The reiterated concern to preserve the Scottish kingdom's ancient laws and liberties may owe more to fear of intensive English government and heavy

¹² Cameron, *James V*, 324–5.

¹³ D. M. Head, 'Henry VIII's Scottish Policy: A Reassessment', *Scottish Historical Review*, 61 (1982), 1–24; Merriman, *Rough Wooings*, esp. ch. 5.

¹⁴ John Major, *A History of Greater Britain as well England as Scotland*, ed. and trans. A. Constable (Scottish History Society, X, 1892). For commentary, see Mason, *Kingship and the Commonweal*, ch. 2.

English taxation than to the theorising of John Mair. Nonetheless, the treaties looked forward to a union of the crowns, but not to a union of the kingdoms.¹⁵

In any event, the treaties proved a dead letter – neither side had any confidence in the other – and Scottish suspicions that Henry VIII was intent on subjugating their kingdom seemed to be amply confirmed by the brutal military campaigns that ensued and that left a trail of death and destruction throughout southern Scotland. The English crown's claim to feudal superiority over Scotland was once again invoked and the Scots reacted predictably, branding the English as heretic spawn of the devil, and reasserting the historic and continuing autonomy of their kingdom.¹⁶ It was to all intents and purposes a replay of the Scottish resistance to Edward I, the only ideological difference – though a crucially important one – being the introduction of a potentially explosive religious dimension to the conflict. Oddly, this was not an issue that seemed to concern Henry VIII. Indeed, he seems never even to have recast his belief in English feudal superiority over Scotland in the imperial language that would have lent real weight and substance to the belief that, in breaking free of Rome, England had recovered its imperial status.¹⁷ It was only following Henry's death in 1547, and the accession of Edward VI under the protection of the duke of Somerset, that religion became central to England's Scottish policy, and that the war effort was justified in terms of a providential opportunity to create an explicitly British kingdom that was both Protestant and imperial. Paradoxically, not only were Scots at the forefront of the propaganda campaign that first popularised the idea of a Protestant Britain, but in their enthusiasm for it they were prepared to jettison all the elaborate historical lore that had been developed to underpin Scottish freedom from English overlordship. Instead, they argued that from the earliest times the Scottish realm had been part of a greater English *imperium* – albeit an *imperium* that was more accurately named Britain or even Great Britain – and that the marriage of Mary Stewart to Edward Tudor heralded, not the creation, but the re-creation of an ancient British empire.¹⁸ In the 1530s the alleged British origins of the

¹⁵ Merriman, *Rough Wooings*, 118–21.

¹⁶ The English claim had been fully set out on Henry VIII's behalf just prior to James V's death in *A Declaration, Conteynyng the Just Causes and Consyderations of this Present Warre with the Scottis, wherin also Appereth the Trew & Right Title that the Kinges Most Royall Maiesty Hath to the Souerayntue of Scotlande* (1542), reprinted in *The Complaynt of Scotlande*, ed. J. A. H. Murray (Early English Text Society, 1872), 191–206.

¹⁷ For this and what follows, see Mason, *Kingship and the Commonwealth*, 251–61; D. Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), ch. 2.

¹⁸ See in particular James Henrisoun (or Harryson), *An Exhortacion to the Scottes to Conforme Themselves to the Honourable, Expedient & Godly Union betwene the Realmes of England & Scotland* (1547), reprinted in *Complaynt of Scotlande*, ed. Murray, 207–36.

Emperor Constantine had been invoked to justify the claim that the realm of England was an empire. By the late 1540s, the first Christian emperor had become a symbolic precedent for an empire that was explicitly British – or, perhaps more accurately, Anglo-British – as well as emphatically Protestant.

Although the ‘Edwardian Moment’ proved fleeting enough, the Constantinian vision of a Protestant and imperial British kingdom survived it and would be reinvigorated, albeit in somewhat more muted form, in the early years of Elizabeth’s reign.¹⁹ Meanwhile, of course, in desperation the Scots entered into a dynastic alliance with France that effectively ceded to the Valois dynasty the sovereignty over their kingdom that they had consistently denied the Tudors,²⁰ while in England the accession of Mary and her marriage to Philip II promised a return to the Catholic fold under Habsburg dominance. Rather than being the seat of an impregnable Protestant and imperial monarchy, Britain in the 1550s looked set to be balkanised by Catholic superpowers with their own imperial agendas. In the event, as France and Spain fought each other to a standstill, Mary Tudor died in 1558 and the Valois king, Henry II, was accidentally killed the following year in a tournament held to celebrate the outbreak of peace with Spain. Just as Elizabeth now found herself queen of England, able to reassert the crown’s imperial authority and impose a moderately Protestant religious settlement, so Mary Stewart suddenly found herself queen of France as well as Scotland, controlled by a Guise family network intent on pressing her Catholic claim to the English throne. In such a context, as discontent with French Catholic rule in Scotland flared into open rebellion, there was renewed hope for Protestantism throughout Britain.²¹

To be sure, in 1559, most English politicians were much more exercised by the loss of Calais to the French than they were by the ever more desperate pleas for assistance emanating from the north. Yet there were those, like Elizabeth’s secretary, William Cecil, who were not only sympathetic to the Edwardian vision of a Protestant and imperial Britain – Cecil had actually accompanied Somerset on his later Scottish campaigns – but who saw amity and ultimately union with Scotland

¹⁹ On the ‘Edwardian Moment’, and the subsequent influence of these ideas, see A. H. Williamson, *Scottish National Consciousness in the Age of James VI* (Edinburgh, 1979), ch. 1.

²⁰ P. Ritchie, *Mary of Guise in Scotland, 1548–1560: A Political Career* (East Linton, 2002), esp. chs. 1–2, on the significance of the ‘protectoral’ alliance established by the treaty of Haddington in 1548.

²¹ For a brief recent analysis of the British dimension of the Scottish Reformation, see C. Kellar, *Scotland, England and the Reformation, 1534–1561* (Oxford, 2003), esp. ch. 6; see also J. E. A. Dawson, *The Politics of Religion in the Age of Mary Queen of Scots: The Earl of Argyll and the Struggle for Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2002), ch. 3.

as fundamental to England's long-term security.²² English foreign policy would thus be orientated away from the chimera of French conquests and concentrate instead on securing England's hegemony in Britain and Ireland. As in the late 1540s, moreover, strategic pragmatism might be couched in the language of Protestant apocalypticism. For what was unfolding in 1559–60 was surely the workings of divine providence, a God-given opportunity to effect the peaceful conjunction of the two realms that had been so foolishly spurned in the 1540s and that had reaped the divine retribution of the 1550s. Elizabeth, in short, might yet emerge in the 1560s as a British as well as an English Constantine. Yet, however urgent, providential and apocalyptic its significance, such a vision of a Protestant and imperial Britain was beset by problems that would continue to dog the cause of Anglo-Scottish union throughout the Elizabethan period and beyond. First, it was by no means clear in 1559–60 that Elizabeth was willing or able to play the key role assigned to her. Second, it was based on sweeping aside the claim of Mary Stewart not only to be the legitimate Queen of Scots but also to have a rightful place in the English succession. And third, this essentially Anglocentric vision of Britain's imperial destiny took little or no account of Scottish sensibilities. It is on these issues as they worked themselves out in Elizabeth's reign that the remainder of this paper is focused.

It perhaps hardly needs saying that the idea of Elizabeth acting out the role of a godly British Constantine, delivering the people of Scotland as well as England from the thralldom of popery, proved as spectacular a piece of miscasting as could be imagined. Elizabeth had no sympathy with the kind of apocalyptic scenarios that saw her leading British – or, still worse, European – Protestantism in a final showdown with the antichristian church of Rome. Constantine was a convenient enough means of legitimising royal authority over the English church, but Elizabeth betrayed no interest in extending her imperial remit to encompass her northern neighbour.²³ If she had a long-term Scottish policy, let alone a vision of Britain, it is remarkably hard to discern what it was. Certainly, Cecil was able to cajole her into embarking on what proved to be a decisive intervention on behalf of Scottish Protestantism in 1559–60, but it was reluctant and half-hearted – and was emphatically

²² J. E. A. Dawson, 'William Cecil and the British Dimension of Early Elizabethan Foreign Policy', *History*, 74 (1989), 196–216; S. Alford, *The Early Elizabethan Polity: William Cecil and the British Succession Crisis, 1558–1569* (Cambridge, 1998).

²³ Significantly, the dedication of the 1563 edition of John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, in which Elizabeth is closely identified with the Emperor Constantine, is quietly dropped from subsequent editions – a measure of Foxe's own disenchantment with the queen's understanding of the limited nature of her religious role; see further T. S. Freeman, 'Providence and Prescription: The Account of Elizabeth in Foxe's "Book of Martyrs"', in *Myth of Elizabeth*, ed. Doran and Freeman, 27–55.

not born of an ideological commitment to a Protestant and imperial British kingdom. Elizabeth's reluctance is perhaps understandable: cash-strapped and insecure, she had no desire to embroil herself in a war with France such as had undermined and eventually destroyed Protector Somerset. Moreover, deeply conscious of her own sovereign rights, she had an evident distaste for interfering with those of another kingdom and sister queen. Thus Elizabeth remained unmoved by the claim to feudal superiority over Scotland which had so excited her father and which Cecil was not slow to resurrect. In so far as Elizabeth had a Scottish policy – and one is tempted to say that her policy was actually not to have a policy – it was limited to short-term measures, pursued at minimal expense, aimed at defending her own dynastic rights and securing England's northern frontier.

As a result, the hopes harboured by Cecil and at least some of his Scottish allies that Anglo-Scottish amity and union might be secured immediately by setting aside Mary Stewart's claim to the Scottish throne and marrying Elizabeth off to the Hamilton heirs presumptive, was little more than pie in the sky.²⁴ Elizabeth would have none of it. In any event, the death in December 1560 of Mary Stewart's husband, the French king Francis II, and the Scottish queen's decision to return to her native kingdom, put paid to the fevered marital speculations of the advocates of a Protestant Britain. Whoever else Elizabeth might marry, it would not be Mary. Yet, though dynastic union appeared to have reached an impasse, strenuous efforts continued to be made to find an accommodation between the two queens which would settle the English succession while advancing, or at least not prejudicing, the Protestant British cause. Once again, however, Elizabeth's unwillingness to discuss either the succession or her own marital plans ensured that these tortuous negotiations got nowhere. By July 1565, when Mary took matters into her own hands and married by Catholic rite Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley, heir to the earl of Lennox, grandson of Margaret Tudor and second only to Mary herself in the English succession, the proponents of Protestant union were in despair. Indeed, by the end of the following year, when Mary staged an elaborate Catholic baptism for her son and heir, Charles James, the future James VI and I, it was Britain's Catholic community that had reason to celebrate.²⁵ However, any hopes of a Catholic succession to the British thrones were quickly dashed by the bizarre and self-destructive acts that led within a matter of months to Mary's imprisonment and enforced abdication. Clearly, Mary's enemies in Scotland were not motivated solely or even primarily by the desire for Anglo-Scottish union. Nonetheless,

²⁴ Kellar, *Scotland, England and the Reformation*, 197–201.

²⁵ M. Lynch, 'Queen Mary's Triumph: The Baptismal Celebrations at Stirling in December 1566', *Scottish Historical Review*, 69 (1990), 1–21.

with Mary in prison and her son in the hands of a committed Protestant regent, it was possible once again to think in terms of the amity and ultimately union that were fundamental to the British agenda.²⁶

It is perhaps not surprising that such an agenda was no more meaningfully pursued after 1567 than it had been in 1559–60. After all, Elizabeth's understanding of the matter had not substantially altered: she remained no more willing to play the British Constantine than she was to countenance the deposition of a fellow monarch. Mary's escape from prison and flight to England afforded Elizabeth the opportunity of furthering the cause of a united Protestant Britain simply by extinguishing Mary as the main focus of Catholic opposition to it. But while many of her subjects, as well as many Scots, bayed for the deposed queen's blood, Elizabeth refused to satisfy them. So unwilling was she to violate the rights of a fellow sovereign, that she would rather have had Mary restored than executed. The result was the uneasy compromise that saw Mary incarcerated in England while Elizabeth lent unenthusiastic support to the succession of Protestant regents who governed Scotland in the name of James VI. Even the earl of Morton, the most enthusiastically pro-English as well as the longest serving of those regents, was offered only minimal and grudging support – and refused a pension.²⁷ Elizabeth simply was not interested and the British strategy that had once so excited at least some of her councillors quietly slipped from the agenda. As a result, Morton's fall in 1578 caught the Elizabethan regime almost totally unawares, while the baronial factionalism that characterised the last years of James's minority remained an unfathomable – though occasionally threatening – mystery.

Commenting on this phase of Anglo-Scottish relations, Wallace MacCaffrey once wrote that Elizabeth's 'attitude to Scottish politicians was not very different from that of her later successors towards troublesome tribal neighbours on the fringes of empire'.²⁸ It is hard to disagree. Elizabeth treated the Scots with a cynical disdain that was born not just of personal prejudice but of assumptions that were deeply rooted in English culture. Just as the claim to English feudal superiority drew inspiration from Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *History of the Kings of Britain*, so English attitudes to their neighbours were moulded by the ethnology of his close contemporary, Gerald of Wales.²⁹ On the cultural spectrum that lay between English civility and Irish barbarism,

²⁶ Alford, *Early Elizabethan Polity*, chs. 6–7; Dawson, *Politics of Religion*, ch. 5.

²⁷ K. M. Brown, 'The Price of Friendship: The "Well-affected" and English Economic Clientage in Scotland before 1603', in *Scotland and England*, ed. Mason, 139–62, at 144–5.

²⁸ W. MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I* (1993), 435.

²⁹ See, for example, H. Morgan, 'Giraldus Cambrensis and the Tudor Conquest of Ireland', in *Political Ideology in Ireland, 1541–1641*, ed. H. Morgan (Dublin, 1999), 22–44.

the Scots were evidently closer to savagery than they were to civilisation. When, in 1577, William Harrison wrote the *Description of Britain* that prefaced Holinshed's *Chronicles*, he not only drew on the unionist literature of the 'Edwardian Moment' to substantiate the English claim to 'the souereignty of this Ile', but also pilloried the (admittedly ancient) Scots as uncivilised barbarians 'who used to feed on the buttocks of boies and womens paps, as delicate dishes'.³⁰ It is fair enough to highlight the development of an Anglo-Scottish Protestant culture that served to promote British integration and unity in the later sixteenth century.³¹ Nevertheless, it would be wrong to under-estimate the depth and enduring power of age-old ethnic prejudices. As King James was to discover after 1603, only a radical change of 'hearts and minds' would make possible his vision of a united British kingdom.

Meanwhile, in the early 1580s, James was emerging from a long and tumultuous minority. In August 1582 he was forcibly kidnapped by the Ruthven Raiders, a coalition of Protestant nobles who had seen the meteoric rise of Esmé Stuart, a cousin of Darnley whom James elevated to the dukedom of Lennox, both as a threat to their own power and as a potentially sinister re-grouping of a Catholic, pro-Marian alliance. The following year James made good his escape and, while it is remarkably difficult to determine exactly when his personal rule began, by the mid-1580s he was no longer simply a prisoner of factional interests.³² In the so-called 'Black Acts' of 1584 he set out a legislative framework that was clearly intended as a reassertion of royal authority over both church and state. Indeed, as the archbishop of St Andrews, Patrick Adamson, made clear in his printed commentary on the acts, James was emperor in his own kingdom, a Scottish Constantine whose writ must run over ecclesiastical as well as civil affairs.³³ As he emerged from his minority, the young Scottish king was intent on reaffirming the imperial status claimed by his Stewart ancestors. At the same time, of course, he was acutely aware of his place in the English succession and intent on ingratiating himself with – or at least not alienating – potential supporters in the Elizabethan regime. For their part, Elizabeth and her councillors were rather slow to respond to James's emergence as a ruler in his own right. It was not so much the appearance on the political scene of an adult,

³⁰ Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (London, 1807–8), I, pp. 10, 196.

³¹ J. E. A. Dawson, 'Anglo-Scottish Protestant Culture and Integration in Sixteenth-Century Britain', in *Conquest and Union: Fashioning a British State, 1483–1725*, ed. S. G. Ellis and S. Barber (London and New York, 1995), 87–114.

³² See J. Goodare, 'Scottish Politics in the Reign of James VI', in *The Reign of James VI*, ed. J. Goodare and M. Lynch (East Linton, 2000), 32–54.

³³ Patrick Adamson, *A Declaration of the Kings Maiesties Intention and Meaning toward the Lait Actis of Parliament* (Edinburgh, 1585); Mason, *Kingship and the Commonwealth*, 205–7.

male and independent rival to Elizabeth's authority within Britain that concentrated the English mind. Rather it was the looming threat of war with Spain that led, in July 1586, to the drawing up of an Anglo-Scottish league that, while offering James no explicit recognition of his right as Elizabeth's successor, gave his cause tacit support in the form of an annual pension.³⁴ However, the real price of accommodation with the Elizabethan regime would only become apparent later that year when James's mother was finally tried and condemned for treason.

As a means of teasing out Scottish attitudes to Elizabeth and Elizabethan England, it is well worth dwelling on the events surrounding the execution of Mary Queen of Scots. Elizabeth's own agonising over the act, and subsequent denial that she was responsible for it, are well known and need not detain us further.³⁵ Less often remarked upon is the popular Scottish outrage at the deed. James himself, in a famous letter of protest against his mother's trial and sentence, not only reflected with a singular lack of diplomatic tact on Elizabeth's father's nasty habit of beheading his bedfellows, but went on to comment that he hardly dared to go outdoors 'for crieng oute of the whole people; and what ys spoken by them of the quene of England, yt greves me to heare, and yet [I] darre not fynd faulte with yt except I would dethrone myself, so ys whole Scotland incensed with this matter'.³⁶ James was no doubt exaggerating for effect. It is notable, for example, that when he ordered the Edinburgh ministers to pray for his mother, they 'obstenatlie refusit'.³⁷ The more radical of the Scots clergy evidently saw no reason to regret the passing of a daughter of Antichrist. Perhaps less predictably, however, the Scottish nobility was almost literally up in arms at what they construed as Mary's unlawful murder. At a convention in May 1587 and again at a parliament summoned in July, they begged James to revenge his mother's murder, vowing to assist with men and money, 'sa lang as ather blude or breath may last'. Whatever their view of Mary as a person, the nobility's pride was deeply hurt by what they saw as England's typically high-handed treatment of their exiled queen. Yet, as Elizabeth and her councillors had calculated, this atavistic response, symptomatic though it was of the deep distrust that lingered between the two kingdoms, proved short-lived. James thanked his nobility for their offer of arms

³⁴ H. G. Stafford, *James VI of Scotland and the Throne of England* (New York and London, 1940), 8–10, 293; J. Goodare, 'James VI's English Subsidy', in *Reign of James VI*, ed. Goodare and Lynch, 110–25.

³⁵ For a recent treatment, see J. Guy, *'My Heart is My Own': The Life of Mary Queen of Scots* (London and New York, 2004), 479–97.

³⁶ *King James's Secret: Negotiations between Elizabeth and James VI relating to the Execution of Mary Queen of Scots, from the Warrender Papers*, ed. R. S. Rait and A. I. Dunlop (1927), 60–2.

³⁷ *The Historie and Life of King James the Sext, 1566–1596*, ed. T. Thomson (Bannatyne Club, XIV, 1825), 225.

and men, but promised only ‘to do tharein as tyme and occasioun sould permit’.³⁸

Time and occasion, and the looming threat of Spanish invasion, ensured that the Scots never mounted their threatened invasion of England and that James remained true to the 1586 accord with Elizabeth. Like Elizabeth, James no doubt shared the view attributed to his envoy, the master of Gray – a view for which Gray was later banished – that ‘the dead don’t bite (*mortui non mordent*)’.³⁹ But neither James nor Elizabeth could openly admit that they had wilfully violated the sanctity of the royal office or tampered with the inviolable principle of indefeasible hereditary right. It was probably easier for James to square his conscience than for Elizabeth. He had had no direct hand in the murky business and, provided Mary’s treason left no stain on his own honour and did not jeopardise his own place in the English succession, he had little reason to mourn a mother whom he had never known and whose very existence was a political and dynastic liability. In his *Memoirs*, Sir James Melville of Halhill commented that, on ripe consideration, James decided not to disturb the peace of the English kingdom by attempting to avenge an evil act perpetrated, not by Elizabeth, but by her misguided councillors. Instead, Melville added astutely, because Elizabeth was ‘of good years and not like to live long’, James might as well bide his time and wreak vengeance once he had come into his rightful inheritance.⁴⁰ In the summer of 1587, James turned twenty-one, while Elizabeth was nearing her fifty-fourth birthday. Elizabeth’s grandfather, Henry VII, had died aged fifty-two; her father, Henry VIII, aged fifty-five; and her half-sister, Mary Tudor, aged forty-two. By any reasonable actuarial calculus, James’s accession to the English throne was imminent. He was not to know that Elizabeth would defy all the actuarial odds and live not for five more years, nor even for ten, but for fifteen and more.

It was a long time to wait, and a tense and frustrating one too, for James could never be totally certain that his succession to the English throne would go unchallenged.⁴¹ It is no surprise that, in the course of the 1590s, as this most literate and intelligent of kings reflected on the nature of kingship, he should develop a theory of divine right monarchy, based on indefeasible hereditary right and the free, absolute – and, by implication, imperial – authority vested in his person.⁴² His thoughts were as much on

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 230, 234.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 226–7; *King James’s Secret*, ed. Rait and Dunlop, 154–5, 209–10.

⁴⁰ *Memoirs of Sir James Melville of Halhill, 1535–1617*, ed. A. F. Steuart (1929), 318.

⁴¹ P. Croft, *King James* (Basingstoke, 2003), 43–50, summarises these concerns and details some of the king’s clandestine correspondence over the succession with English courtiers ranging from Essex to Lord Henry Howard and Robert Cecil.

⁴² Notably in his *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies* (1598), reprinted in *King James VI and I, the Political Writings*, ed. J. P. Sommerville (Cambridge, 1994), 62–84.

England, and on Catholic opposition to his succession there, as they were on Scotland. Meanwhile, as Elizabeth's last decade wore interminably on, it was in Scotland that some of the most interesting speculation on the future of Britain emerged. In 1594, for example, Andrew Melville, in the unlikely guise of a court poet, celebrated the birth and baptism of James's first male heir, Prince Henry, by articulating a vision of united Britain that openly challenged the imperial ideas of the king himself.⁴³ Melville was not only a Calvinist revolutionary, but also a civic humanist, the friend and in some respects the intellectual heir of James's former tutor and *bête noir*, George Buchanan. Like Buchanan, he was fiercely opposed to the idea of empire, not just on the presbyterian grounds that the royal supremacy was incompatible with the independence of the church, but also because it sapped the civic energy on which political participation depended, turning subjects into slaves rather than citizens.⁴⁴ Like that other Scottish presbyterian unionist, David Hume of Godscroft, Melville envisaged Britain, not as an empire, but as some sort of godly confederation whose constituent polities would be covenanted with each other as well as with God.⁴⁵

Melville and Godscroft were hardly representative of broadly based Scottish opinion. Nevertheless, their views are worth noting because they indicate that, by the mid-1590s, some Scots were not just reconciled to the prospect of union, but were intellectually excited by its possibilities. To be sure, as the post-1603 unionist literature makes clear, they worried about Scotland's status within a united Britain – fearing, as the pro-union lawyer John Russell put it, that Scotland would become 'subalterne' to England and 'thairby ancienne Scotland to loss hir beauty for evir! God forbid!'⁴⁶ – and probably only a handful would have subscribed to Godscroft's Calvinist republican reconfiguration of its polity. But it was the Scots rather than the English who were exercised and even energised by the idea of Britain and it was Scots who led the way in developing a language and conceptual framework capable of articulating an understanding of Britain's multiple monarchy as something other than the product of a

⁴³ *Principis Scoti-Britannorum natalia*, printed in the original Latin with English translation in George Buchanan, *The Political Poetry*, ed. and trans. P. J. McGinnis and A. H. Williamson (Scottish History Society, fifth series, VIII, 1995), 276–81. The poem was not well received in England: M. Lynch, 'Court Ceremony and Ritual during the Personal Reign of James VI', in *Reign of James VI*, ed. Goodare and Lynch, 71–92, at 89.

⁴⁴ See Williamson's introduction to Buchanan, *Political Poetry*, 31–6.

⁴⁵ See *The British Union: A Critical Edition and Translation of David Hume of Godscroft's 'De Unione Insulae Britannicae'*, ed. and trans. P. J. McGinnis and A. H. Williamson (Aldershot, 2002).

⁴⁶ John Russell, 'A Treatise of the Happie and Blissed Unioun', in *The Jacobean Union: Six Tracts of 1604*, ed. B. R. Galloway and B. P. Levack (Scottish History Society, fourth series, XXI, 1985), 84.

dynastic lottery.⁴⁷ As a Scot, and the first British king, James VI and I not unnaturally shared this enthusiasm and was prepared to experiment with the governance of his multiple monarchy – so long as it reinforced rather than undermined his own authority. But his campaign for closer and more complete union, and for the fashioning of a new British identity, met with either stony English silence or vocal English resistance. As a result, he was inclined to fall back on variations of the Anglo-British imperial ideology first articulated in the late 1540s, an ideology that allowed the new Britain to be construed as little more than old England writ large.⁴⁸

Yet one cannot help thinking that, when James gloried in his Constantinian and even Arthurian inheritance, he understood it to mean something different from Elizabeth's understanding of it: expansive, perhaps even transoceanic, rather than insular and introverted. Commenting on the view that Henry VIII was possessed of a grand British imperial vision, J. J. Scarisbrick expressed doubt that the English king was 'either guilty or capable of such high statesmanship'.⁴⁹ In this respect, as apparently in so many others, Elizabeth was entirely her father's daughter. In circumstances that were far more favourable to Anglo-Scottish concord and integration, when indeed the future of Britain was hers to shape, she chose to do as little as possible. For better or for worse, Britain and its empire owe far more to James Stewart than they do to Elizabeth Tudor.

⁴⁷ In addition to the works already cited, see in particular A. H. Williamson, 'Patterns of British Identity: "Britain" and its Rivals in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in *The New British History*, ed. Burgess, 138–73.

⁴⁸ Mason, *Kingship and the Commonwealth*, 266–9; A. H. Williamson, 'Scotland, Antichrist and the Invention of Great Britain', in *New Perspectives on the Politics and Culture of Early Modern Scotland*, ed. J. Dwyer et al. (Edinburgh, 1982), 34–58.

⁴⁹ J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII* (1976), 548–50.