
THE RISE OF EUROPE'S

The formation of the European Community and the end of the Cold War had one common and quite unintended result: Both gave encouragement to the nationalist urges of numerous regions within Europe's established nation-states. What these stirrings will finally produce in places such as the former Yugoslavia, Scotland, or Lombardy is impossible to predict. But three of our contributors—Alastair Reid, William McPherson, and David Gies—look at three different cases to show what has already come to pass. Our fourth author, G. M. Tamás, explores the ideological foundations of this unsettling ethnic nationalism.



THE SCOTTISH CONDITION

Some years ago, I came across a few references to the Fourth World, a geopolitical coinage that was meant to embrace all those ex-nation-states, ethnic and religious minorities, and other sovereignties lost through the twists of history, small races swallowed up at some point by larger, latter-day states. The Fourth World

remains, however, a linguistic abstraction. Unlike the countries we group together as the Third World, which do have realities in common, those entities that make up the so-called Fourth World are unlikely to pool their grievances or make common cause, for their situations are utterly separate and unique, some of them very ancient indeed, as in the case of the

LITTLE NATIONS



BY ALASTAIR REID

Basques of Spain. The demands of such enclaves may very well occupy an international small-claims court for the next century. At present, we are made only too brutally aware of the ruthlessness and mindlessness of their impatience. In talking about thwarted nationalism, however, one fundamental point has to be made: While it is quite possible to under-

stand from the outside the arguments, legal and historical—the entire rationale behind the surges of nationalism—it is impossible to apprehend the nature and intensity of the feelings involved.

I am aware of those feelings, though in a milder form, through my growing up in Scotland, and although I have often enough explained Scotland's case to friends from elsewhere, I know how impossible it is to make them feel how it feels, for it is something close to the bone and fiber of being. The kind of nationalism I am talking about arises from situations in which a smaller country is taken over by a larger power, which imposes on it a new official identity, a culture, and often a new language, suppressing the native identity and driving it inward to become a secret, private self. In conditions of such subjugation, a people is forced to become both bilingual and bicultural. That duality lies at the heart of suppressed nationalism. While many such takeovers have had successful conclusions in human history, some decidedly have not; it is from these that nationalist feelings arise, from situations of deep discontent, from a resentment of a ruling authority coupled with a deep fear of losing the particular ways and myths of being and believing that have always told a once-independent people who they were.

For a very long time, whenever I went back to Scotland, I put out an extra-wary antenna to pick up any trace of what we used to call the "Scottish Condition." The Scottish Condition can show itself fleetingly in the smallest of gestures, a sniff or a sigh, or it can take a voluble spoken form, but it has lurked for a long time in the undercurrents of Scottish life. It wells from ancestral gloom, from the shadows of a severe Calvinism, and from a gritty mixture of disappointment and indignation, and it mantles the Scottish spirit like an

ancient moss. "It's no' right," that cry that echoed through my childhood, is one wrenched from the Scottish soul, implying a deep unfairness at the heart of things. I grew up under a low cloud of girth and grumble, never quite understanding what the injustice was, for it was never identified. It was just something in the air, a kind of national weather, a damp mist of dissatisfaction.

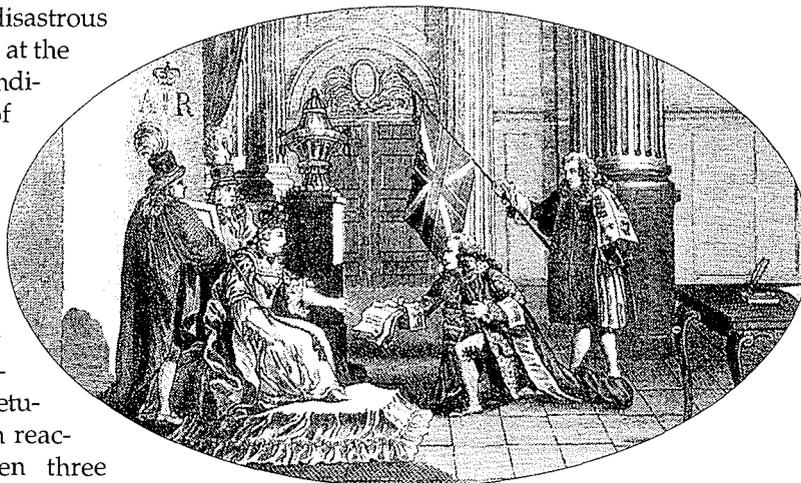
Scotland would qualify as a senior member of the Fourth World. In essence, the Scottish Condition stems from the fact that, since 1707, Scotland has been an ex-nation, a destiny that its people have never quite accepted or even understood, but one that they have so far been unable to alter. The year 1707 is a date as dire as doomsday to Scottish ears. In 1707, the parliaments of the sovereign countries of England and Scotland signed an Act of Union, yielding up their separate sovereignties and parliaments to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain, ruled over by a British parliament. But the omens were not exactly favorable to union: The two countries had fought each other on more than 300 occasions, according to Sir Walter Scott, and were accustomed to regarding each other as enemies. Although the majority of Scots were opposed to union, Scotland was in an impoverished condition, its coffers emptied out by the failure, in 1699, of its ill-planned colonial enterprise in Darién (in present-day Panama), on which it had banked for survival. It badly needed access to the rich trading markets of England and its colonies, and the fact that union brought immediate economic relief to Scotland swept aside deeper considerations and ignored the wishes of the majority. By the terms of the act, Scotland retained certain autonomies—it kept its own legal code, the body of Scots law; it kept the Presbyterian Church of Scotland; it kept its

own educational system; and it was granted representation in the Parliament in Westminster. At present, there are 72 Scottish members of Parliament out of 650, a proportion that is a constant reminder of their minority status.

While the Act of Union was always seen as a Scottish sellout, there could have been no way of knowing how much it was to become an English takeover. Whatever expectations may have been, no "union," in any deep sense of the word, took place, no national self-image was replaced by another, no "British" meta-character evolved. Citizens of the United Kingdom rarely refer to themselves as British, except when traveling abroad, for "Great Britain" exists more in a diplomatic and legislative sense than in a human one. Union suddenly handed the Scots a dual nationality: Officially, they were British, but in their own minds, their own mirrors, they were Scots. No such duality afflicted the English. For them, "Britain" and "England" were synonyms from the beginning, an assumption that has always infuriated the Scots. In the eyes of the English, Scotland had gone from being a troublesome neighbor to becoming a remote northern region, a market, an occasional playground, a ghost of its former fierce self. From the beginning, English culture dominated, but it took some time for it to dawn on the Scots that by the terms of union, England appeared to have made considerable gains, while they, on the contrary, had acquired an ambiguous identity. At first, there was a degree of confidence among the Scots that they would remain stoutly themselves, and would hold together in a cultural sense. But the Scottish self, with the passing of time, became an increasingly resentful one, as Scottish affairs were given short shrift in the proceedings at Westminster. To be left with a culture, a history, and a national character, and yet to have no longer any political control over the terms of national ex-

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istence, amounts to a disastrous emasculation. That lies at the heart of the Scottish Condition. The distinctness of Scottish nationality had little to sustain it but memory, and so, for almost 300 years, the Scots have wallowed in an aggrieved nostalgia, uncertain of what it means now to be Scottish, and gnawing perpetually at the problem. In reaction, they have taken three courses: Some have left Scotland behind, to find fortune in some other country; some have taken the Union at face value and gone south to England; some have stayed at home, to see what Scotland would become, to see what would become of it.



Queen Anne receiving the Act of Union in 1707

I had a geography teacher in Edinburgh who used to tell us gleefully (he was English), “The Scots are like dung, only good when spread.” History may very well bear him out. I am always astonished by the ubiquity of Scottish emigrants. What they took with them was an austere self-sufficiency and a sturdy independence, determined to make the most of what they found. Since what they found was generally more than what they had left behind, they prospered, the homeland a flinty, waning memory. I am aware that my Scottish beginnings, frugal and somewhat severe, splendidly prepared me for a peripatetic life, since I have always felt my needs to be few, and portable. Of the Scots who remained, however, a fair proportion of them accepted, and still accept, the Union, moving to England to enjoy a life in which their Scottishness lies all but buried, or is kept as a kind of fancy dress. While the case for union can be argued coherently, it is contradicted by the grumble of discontent that underlies Scottish realities, a grumble that has never gone away.

That the Union was engineered by a minority of Scots became clear when, in the first

half of the 18th century, the Highlands twice rose in armed rebellion. The ruthlessness with which an English army put down Prince Charles’s rebellion in 1746, and the brutal subduing of the Highlands that followed, left no doubt as to where the power lay. Yet in the latter part of the 18th century, Edinburgh enjoyed such a flowering, intellectually and architecturally, and housed such a concentration of distinguished thinkers, that it could justifiably claim to be an influential European capital. The “Scottish Enlightenment,” as it came to be called, gained for the Scots such renown that Voltaire wrote, “It is from Scotland that we receive rules of taste in all the arts, from epic painting to gardening.” Around 1750, a visionary lord provost of Edinburgh, George Drummond, set in motion the plan to build a New Town to the north of Edinburgh’s craggy, overcrowded center. The New Town took 50 years to complete, but the grace of its broad avenues, its ample squares and curved terraces, all with a unifying Georgian facade, make it even today as elegant a piece of city as you could ever find. By some curious architectural alchemy, the New Town seemed to summon into being, as though to fill its graceful mold, the extraordinary men of the time—law lords, men of science, social thinkers, philosophers, many of them holding university chairs.

David Hume and his friend Adam Smith remain the most illustrious names from that period, but their peers were many, and with Scotland in a relatively settled state, it seemed for a time that the Union might allow it to maintain a purely cultural identity, relieved of having to govern itself.

That was the fervent belief of the Enlightenment's favorite son, Sir Walter Scott. No one could have been a more dedicated Scot than he, yet he saw union as a forward step, relieving Scotland of its ancient rages and bringing it a relative prosperity. Bewitched by Scotland's vivid and violent past, Scott proceeded to mummify it in all his many writings, lighting it with the candle glow of nostalgia. That prevailing view locked Scotland into the fixed attitude of looking backward, the present and the future being out of its hands. As my history master in Edinburgh was fond of saying, Scotland was from 1707 on a country with its future behind it. Yet Scott has to be credited with a certain prescience: In one of his letters, he wrote, "If you unscotch us, you will find us damned mischievous Englishmen."

Improbably enough, Queen Victoria contributed to the mummification of Scotland's image. On the death of Prince Albert in 1861, she virtually took refuge in Scotland, where she encouraged the cultivation of a historical identity for the Scots by reviving the ancient fabric of clans and tartans and helping to create the image of Scotland that still shows up in the whisky advertisements. That image persists, and the Scots are certainly not innocent of exploiting it. Scotland's summers, which can be glorious, are thick with tourists, and the degree of tartan hype makes it not too difficult to imagine a quite different future for Scotland, in which it turns into a living museum, a heritage park for global travelers.

As I grew up, I felt the Scottish past intruding thickly into the present, in the form of ruins and history lessons and a litany of heroes and battles, the past of pugnacious nationhood. In our playground games, the English

were always the enemy; occasional English children at school were regarded as Martians, beings beyond us. That past is monumentalized all over Scotland, and it is thickly and meticulously documented in the National Library in Edinburgh, studied, pored over, and fed on. Scotland was something that had been lost; it was The Past, and the past in consequence was held in some reverence, throwing a long shadow on the present. The other shadow was cast by a long-engrained Calvinism, severe, judgmental, unforgiving. In Scotland, I once remarked to a passing neighbor on the beauty of the day, to hear her mutter in reply, "We'll pay for it."

A Scottish identity, which the Scots had once worn easily and naturally, had by the 19th century become for them a kind of secret self, which could only emerge on certain occasions, such as sporting confrontations, but which otherwise hung about like a rueful shadow. Scottishness became a kind of free-floating nationality, something like a dress suit, to be worn on unspecified occasions, a pointlessness. None of the compensatory forms that nationalism could take, in the arts, in sporting competition, provided more than a brief venting of steam. The country lived, it seemed, in a state of mourning for itself. I recall feeling this secretiveness about things Scottish as a child. I remember being puzzled by it, as I was by the habit Scots have of looking warily at the sky, as though something darkly unforeseen might fall from it.

It seems that at the heart of nationalist discontents lies always a dilemma of language. As often as not, when smaller states or cultures are overrun by larger powers, they are overrun at the same time by a dominant outside language, so that the native language becomes secondary, separate, secret even. To speak it is a subversive act. A language imposed from the outside forces a people to become bilingual in order to survive, and saddles them with a dual nature. That duality is experienced over and over again simply in the act of speaking. When the public use

of Catalan was officially banned in Franco's Spain, the language became for the Catalans a secret weapon, a readily available expression of defiance and complicity, a bond felt in the tongue. Now that Catalonia has its own language restored to it, Catalans use it aggressively and ubiquitously.

It is Scotland's curious linguistic situation that feeds its cultural ambiguity, that underlines its discontents and keeps them palpable. While Scotland and England were still independent countries, the language used by the Scots had much the same relation to the English of England that, say, Dutch has to German today.* The two languages, Scots and English, had, after all, a common source, and were mutually intelligible, at least in their written form, to English and Scots alike. But English was certainly the more dominant of the two, particularly since, from the 16th century on, the Scots had used an English version of the Bible, and through it were well familiar with written English, although they pronounced it in their own manner. After union, however, it became clear that English culture, and the English language in particular, had no intention of moving over to accommodate the Scots in any mode or manner. Scotland needed the Union more than England did, and as their merchants went south to better themselves, they were obliged to conduct their business in the English language, a tacit condition they had no choice but to accept. It was English that was taught in Scottish schools—English was the official, public language, and was synonymous with "correctness." I remember well, at school in the Scottish Border Country, that we would speak in our own local fashion in the playground, but as we entered the classroom, we crossed a linguistic threshold and spoke English. A Scots word used in class made us laugh aloud: It was an irregularity. Speaking English was, to us, speaking "proper," which rendered our own local speech improper by implication, secondary,

*Gaelic, at least since the 14th century, has been largely confined to the northwest Highlands, where its use has steadily declined.

somehow inferior. David Hume, although the staunchest of Scots, would nevertheless send his manuscripts to English friends for them to weed out his Scotticisms, which he did not consider appropriate to serious discourse. Yet I treasure the Scots I still have, for its downrightness and for its blunt vocabulary, for words as wonderfully apt as the verb *to swither*, which means to be of two minds about something, like an undecided voter. I also feel, as is often the case in bilingual situations, that I write English with especial care, feeling it somehow a foreign language, and having to dominate it as a form of self-defense.

It is no longer accurate to say that Scots today is a separate language, as once it was; rather, it is a linguistic mode, a manner of using English, yet with a rich extra vocabulary of Scots words. In speech, the Scots reject the mannerisms of "English English" for a blunt directness, a spare and wary address; ingrained in the Scottish spirit is a downright egalitarianism that insists on taking others as they present themselves, whatever they may represent, a natural democracy of feeling. The way the Scots speak among themselves, in their own words, has remained domestic and intimate. But although all Scots are well schooled in English, even the remaining Gaelic speakers in parts of the Highlands, it still has the feel for them of a foreign language, something that, although they live comfortably enough in it, does not quite fit them. Among themselves, they modify it so that it does, but to outsiders they speak English. As Robert Lewis Stevenson put it, "Even though his tongue acquired the southern knack, he will still have a stray Scot's accent of the mind."

Every time I hear a Scot speaking with an Englishman, I am acutely aware of how different are the two modes, the manners of speaking the language. The "official" English accent, called variously "Oxford," or "BBC English," or "Nobspeak," is a curious phenomenon. It is left over from the Empire, an accent that is clearly designed to command, that implies a

whole morality and a view of history, and carries a certain condescension, a superiority, a distancing. It is not a regional accent, though it became the language of a ruling class. It can be acquired, and is, by Scots as well as English, through the agency of institutions such as the English public schools. It is in utter contrast to the manner in which the Scots use English—direct, vigorous, unadorned, even blunt. The different speech modes embody all the differences of history, of nature, of human manner, and although on an everyday level they co-exist easily, they still speak across a distance of being.

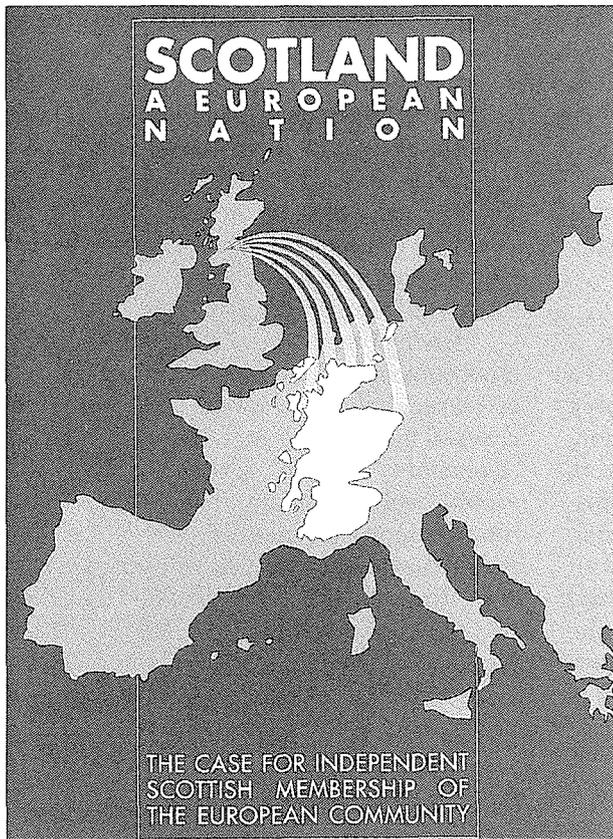
I grew up with the labyrinthine arguments of Scottish nationalism ringing early in my ears. Every Scottish community seemed to have at least one blunt and vociferous nationalist, an agent provocateur who hectored those who came to listen about the string of injustices they were supposed to be suffering. I used to go to meetings of the Scottish National Party (SNP) occasionally, as schoolboy and student, and what I recall most of all is the petulance, the air of injury that hung over those gatherings: Their speakers were daring—even provoking—their audiences to admit to buried feelings of having been wronged, exhorting them to turn their secret sense of injury into a banner and, in election years, to vote accordingly. But there were Scots, patriots enough in their own eyes, who rejected the badgering of the SNP, hoping for a different, though yet undreamed, expression for their nationalism. Indeed, the nationalist movement has always been beset by ardent factionalism. The plain reason is that nationalist feelings, although present in every Scot, vary in degree from white-hot to infinitesimal, and take on so many different forms that the only common ground of agreement among Scots is the sense of having been wronged. It is to be hoped, however, that the day of “grievance” nationalism is waning, for it has led not so much to clear thinking about Scotland’s situation as to something verging on a gloomy expectation of disappointment.

Where Irish nationalism burned, Scottish nationalism barely smoldered. But Ireland had

been conquered, while Scotland had merely made a questionable deal. Ireland, besides, had a history, a religion, a language, a clear identity, something to fight for, to die for.

Scotland had no such incendiary cause, only a slow fire that often seems to have gone out, only to flare unexpectedly at times. “The English yoke” had meaning in Ireland, but in Scotland only irony, for Scotland had not been oppressed, only slighted. Instead, English culture and language became so dominant as to saddle the Scots with enough of a duality of being to make their conflict an inward one. The Irish had a tangible enemy, England; in Scotland, the argument really took place between separate parts of the self, a circumstance as paralyzing to the Scots as it was to Hamlet. Scotland has been less a subdued country than a self-subduing one. Scottish nationalism does not turn violent, except possibly on sporting occasions, and its notion of civil disobedience amounts to no more than sticking stamps with the queen’s head on them upside-down on their envelopes, all of which might suggest that the Scots have become so accustomed to their aggrieved state that it feels like home to them.

During the last 50 years, national feelings have seethed in Scotland at irregular intervals. In the 1970s, as the vast oil fields of the North Sea were being discovered, there was a lot of muttering in Scotland, muttering that brought the SNP into the fray with the slogan, “It’s Scotland’s Oil.” The campaign brought the SNP a lot of votes; in the two elections of 1974, it found itself with first seven and then 11 Scottish Nationalist members of Parliament, enough to force the Labour Party, then in power, to commit itself to devolving some power to Scotland and Wales. In 1977, after weary years of commissions of inquiry and parliamentary committees, separate acts for Scotland and Wales were put on the Westminster agenda, to be preceded by a national referendum. On March 1, 1979, the Scottish electorate was given the opportunity to vote yes (for a form of Scottish self-govern-



The Scottish National Party calls for a politically autonomous Scotland as a nation among nations within the encompassing embrace of the European Community.

ment) or no (opposing it). It seemed that Scotland's moment was arriving; but the result only intensified the national frustration. With an electorate then of 3.8 million, 32 percent voted yes, 30 percent no, and 37 percent did not vote. Of the votes cast, as the SNP was quick to point out, the yes votes had 51.6 percent as against 48.4 percent voting no. The results, however, could by no stretch of



the imagination be called emphatic. More important, the government had set a threshold for the referendum: 40 percent of the electorate must register a yes vote for devolution to proceed to the next stage. So the referendum failed to carry, and Scotland slumped back into a kind of stupefaction. What always infuriates the Scots is English indifference to their difference, and the Scottish MPs took their revenge by voting with the Tories to bring down the government, thus propelling into power Margaret Thatcher, who, during her 11 years in office, inadvertently did wonders for the cause of Scottish nationalism by uniting the Scots in the loathing they felt for her. With her party holding only 12 Scottish seats out of 72, the Scots felt that she in no way represented them. She in turn made it clear from the beginning that she had no interest whatsoever in any Scottish claims to a devolution of power, and that in her book the Union was not open to question.

Thatcher was mightily indifferent to the Scottish situation, but, worse than that, she patronized the Scots. Curiously enough, it was to her accent, which she had gone to great pains to acquire, that she owed much (though certainly not all) of her extreme unpopularity in Scotland, an accent that grated on Scottish ears. Hackles rose at its presumptions of rightness, its lofty self-assurance, its dismissiveness—all Scots have endured similar English schoolteachers, similar public pomposities, to the muttering point. I have heard Thatcher's voice on

the evening news suddenly cut through the clishmaclaver of an Edinburgh pub, abruptly stilling the conversation, and causing a dark flush to spread collectively up the necks of its grim listeners. Such moments are at the inexplicable core of nationalism; it is at such moments that it occurs to me all over again that the Union, from the beginning, was not really a very good idea.

Ten years after the referendum, a group of concerned Scots formed a Campaign for a Scottish Assembly and, after a year of consultation, published a Claim of Right for Scotland, a document that laid out, in a clear and dispassionate manner, the case for Scotland's having an elected assembly of its own to deal with Scottish affairs. The document also stressed the need for constitutional reform in the United Kingdom, and made its case so sensibly that most intelligent Scots today view it as something of a blueprint for an inevitable future. The Scottish National Party, however, clinging to its grievances, refused to associate itself with the Claim of Right, instead pressing somewhat wishfully for full Scottish independence under the somewhat wishful umbrella of European union. The squabbles over independence or devolution effectively splintered the main argument: that Scotland should govern itself directly, in some form or other.

The cautious expectation at present is that, should the Conservatives lose the next election, which seems increasingly likely, Scotland will eventually get a Scottish assembly sitting in Edinburgh, with control over Scottish affairs, and limited fiscal powers. All emotion aside, it makes sense. It almost came to pass in March 1992, when the Labour Party was confidently projected by all the polls to win power from the Conservatives, and had promised a devolved assembly to the Scots. The whole country fizzed with expectation. The

polls, however, were wrong, and the Tories returned to power. I was in Scotland in the wake of that election, and I have never felt it so deflated, so dashed, so desolate, for John Major soon made it clear that his party would not budge from its stance on the Union. The SNP's fanciful plan for an independent Scotland in a European union seemed also suddenly inconceivable, and Scotland has since remained dormant, lying in wait.

Among themselves, the Scots are nothing if not contentious, obstinate in argument. Yet, as I write that, I remember being frequently checked in my youth for making such broad statements. "You can't generalize," my elders would declare, shaking their heads, an admonishment I resented bitterly, since they themselves seemed to do so with alacrity. I see now, however, that when they said that, they had Scotland in mind, for while most Scots partake of the national discontent to a greater or lesser degree, they are very far from unanimous about how to remedy it. Nor are they unanimous in their resentments, which run all the way from the small and snifty to the voluble and impassioned. After Scotland was deprived of its public existence, it really turned into countless secret countries, private Scotlands, from the sentimental to the politically committed. For that reason, Scottish self-government, while generally wished for, is infinitely disputed, causing some to voice the view that, were Scotland granted its own assembly, such a body might be the beginning of its country's troubles, rather than an end to them. I doubt that. I think that the Scots have shed in large part their ancestral gloom and their defeatism, if not their contentiousness, and will do very well at taking charge of their own affairs. In spite of nearly 300 years of ambiguous history, Scotland has persisted as a reality in its own mind, and it certainly has the energy and the imagination (and the humor) to become one in a responsible, political sense.