Stuart WARD, *Untied Kingdom: A Global History of the End of Britain*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023, 550 p.)

This review was written in Denmark, thereby allowing for immediate highlighting of the importance of the book. British intervention helped Denmark survive when Bismarck took Schleswig and Holstein in 1864, and the country thereafter oriented itself both geopolitically and economically to Britain. Loyalty, admiration, and affection subsequently marked the connection between the two countries. That is no longer the case, with Britain now seen here as rather pathetic—unreliable, childish, and wholly lacking in self-control. This is also the view held in much of Europe. How could a country once so admired have fallen so low? Sociology needs to pay attention to what is happening in the world, of course, with an understanding of this dreadful development being almost mandatory. But there is a second wholly sociological reason for taking this book seriously. We tend to think of a society in terms derived from Weber and Durkheim, as a territory ruled by a state able to monopolize violence and within which norms are shared. This is quite as much Gellner's world of a state with its national culture, and that culture with its own state. Ward stresses that Britishness was never like this: "Paradoxically, Britishness borrowed freely from the raw materials of nationalism for its categories of inclusion and exclusion—shared language, culture, religion, history, ethnicity and civic ideals, all duly romanticized and mythologized—whilst at the same time resisting the principal object of nationalist strivings: a sovereign claim to a clearly delineated territory." [39] This points to the character of the argument: the focus is cultural, dealing above all with aspects of national identity. We are not given an analysis of the economics of the British system, although interesting geopolitical comments abound.

Ward describes the strange world of Britishness—flexible, ambivalent, and contradictory—in stages. The three chapters that make up the "Prologue" describe the creation of this world, its early exclusions as well as its determination to include, noting finally that little changed in the interwar years despite the new norms then affecting the world polity. The second part—"Registers"—looks in detail at six episodes showing Britishness at work, and equally beginning to fail. First, he considers the debates, endless in themselves, about naming this world, particularly

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heated as the words "imperial" and "British" had to be omitted given Indian sensitivity, albeit these omissions were fiercely resisted by the white Dominions. Second, he describes the gift of a house in Kenya to Princess Elizabeth, occupied briefly and never revisited, not least for the reason that the Mau Mau rebellion was by then underway. The third chapter revolves around the refusal of a hotel room in London to Learie Constantine, the great West Indian cricketer—that is, it describes the attempts of non-whites to enter into the metropole that was purportedly their own. The fourth chapter continues the story, noting the attempts of the early African National Congress to "get into" the British world before rejecting it when South Africa embraced apartheid and became a republic in 1961. The fifth chapter describes Britain's slow struggles to enter the Common Market, seen especially by Australia and New Zealand as a great betrayal, an exclusion on this occasion even of the white world that had hitherto been favored in a myriad of ways by the British project. The final chapter concentrates on Rhodesia, that is, on the unilateral declaration of independence of a white colony—one which gained considerable sympathy from elsewhere in the British world, not least from the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland. The final part of the book —"Repercussions"—considers the world after empire. An initial chapter on the Suez Crisis is followed by chapters dealing with attempts at self-strengthening within Britain: the refusals to allow British passport holders—above all Kenyan Asians—to enter into Britain; the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland; secessionist pressures in Wales and Scotland; and the very interesting attempts to establish new versions of national identity in places that had once considered themselves to be part of this Britannic world.

   Time and again, one's reaction to the episodes described is simple horror. The genocidal practices of white Anglo-Saxon settlers, hungry for land, are still not fully appreciated. Neither is the fact, so clearly demonstrated here, that the system as a whole was racist to the core. Nevertheless, there is also a mass of uncomfortable black humor in the book, which led me often to wryly laugh aloud, for this is the world caricatured so accurately by the Monty Python team—blustering, ridiculous, almost crazy. This is certainly the reaction of someone who lived through many of these episodes, but perhaps others will feel the same way —for Monty Python, to my astonishment, was taken up by the whole world. Ward's account is, so to speak, pitch-perfect, catching every inflection, every assumption. And this takes us well beyond ridicule. The tears of the Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker in February 1965 when the Maple Leaf became Canada's flag were real, as were the

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equally sorrowful outbursts from Manitoban politicians. So too was the despair of Enoch Powell—whose career is brilliantly described by Ward —at the loss of empire, and the need he felt thereafter to fortify the metropole in a way that would change the country definitively. Discriminating judgment is present throughout—not least about the masculine cast of the British project, and its failure over time to realize that the home country was in fact doing rather well, rather than being seen as a moral and economic failure. Equally impressive is the sheer artistry involved in each chapter, taking a theme in each case and using it to range far and wide across the British space. At the back of it all lies a clear analytic scheme that can rather easily be spelled out, best divided into two periods.

The racism at the heart of the project is made clear early on through a contrast between two events at different ends of the empire which occurred just before the First World War. Andrew Bonar Law, later Prime Minister from October 1922 to May 1923, made it clear at a major Unionist gathering at Blenheim Pace in July 1912 that his party would not be "bound by the restraints which would influence us in an ordinary constitutional struggle" should Home Rule legislation be passed, weakening the empire and sending Protestants into a Catholic-dominated polity. There are echoes here of Putin's Russia, which is equally determined to include different constituents within its domain, albeit in this case in order to recreate imperial unity. Bonar Law had been born in Canada in 1858, but had easy access to the heights of power in the metropole. The same was not true of the 376 male Sikhs hailing from the Punjab who had tried to enter Canada a few months earlier in May 1914, seeking to dock their chartered ship in Vancouver. They failed and suffered for months languishing in the harbor, where they were once even attacked. British Columbia was open for whites from the Dominions and Irish settlers as well, but the color bar proved to be absolute. In this single episode can be seen the key contradiction that doomed much of the British project to eventual failure. One form of the empire was available for whites. But the other form stressed liberal ideals, the belief—of theory but not practice—that Britain was a liberal entity bringing civilization to all its territories. It did not take very long in the 20th century to move from wanting rights within the empire to employing its intellectual tools to demand exit from it. The classic instance here is the Indian Congress Party, which was interested in Dominion status for a very few years after the First World War before moving firmly to an anti-imperial, secessionist stance.

The second stage is not clearly delineated, indeed initially scarcely recognized by the participants themselves, but absolutely consequential,

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nonetheless. The Second World War had exhausted Great Britain and it slowly became obvious that the empire could not be maintained. Indian troops had always been the backbone of the empire, needed everywhere except in the white Dominions, and the loss of that force often meant employing troops from the metropole at prohibitive cost. Equally important was the slow realization that the hopes of trading within the empire—never turned into a system before the First World War, but with some semblance of reality in the protectionist interwar years, and seemingly with attractions in the postwar world—were illusory. Continental European states moved sharply ahead in this postwar period, forced up the product cycle by their trade with prosperous and demanding rivals. Then British claims to provide a world ideology were replaced by the discourse of human rights, while the creation of world media shone an unflattering light on British practices. In this world, exclusions became ever stronger. Rights to citizenship were curtailed, albeit in underhand ways giving much to white overseas settlers that was denied to non-whites. Brutal policy change meant that Asians transported by Britain to serve as an intermediary class in East Africa were refused entry to the metropole, as noted; a disgraceful move based on an absurd moral panic. This was the era in which the pound sterling was devalued, resulting in a literature—encapsulated in the title of the cultural critic Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*—revealing aspect upon aspect of decline. The slow pace of Britain's entry into the Common Market led to similar hand-wringing in the white Dominions. But what was most noticeable was the decision to fight against the trend. The situation in Northern Ireland was particularly revealing. Ward writes with great skill and scholarship here, demonstrating that it was the growth in Unionist militancy, a movement that was determined to remain wholly British, that led to the better-known Civil Rights marches. He writes equally well about equivalent militancy in the Falklands and in Gibraltar. But the other side of the picture was the emergence of secessionist nationalism in Wales, and above all in Scotland.

This is a wonderful book, the thickest description imaginable of an inexorable process. It draws heavily on the work of the imperial historian John Darwin, but is indebted most of all to the work of the late, much-lamented public intellectual Tom Nairn, the author of *The Break-Up of Britain* [1977]. But criticism is called for at this point. The title of Ward's book brings to mind Nairn's volume. This is a mistake, as Ward's reach is much broader, with the state of the Union taking up only something like 15 percent of his volume—whose real concern is Britishness in general. A second criticism is also necessary. One part of British mythology is that of

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the special relationship with the United States resulting from the transfer of power at the end of the 19th century—combined just as much with American determination to replace Britain in its world role as the Second World War ended. Harold Macmillan made this point to Richard Crossman, the Director of Psychological Warfare at Allied Forces Head-quarters in 1942: "We, my dear Crossman, are Greeks in this American empire. You will find the Americans much as the Greeks found the Romans—great big vulgar, bustling people, more vigorous than we are and also more idle, with more unspoiled virtues, but also more corrupt. We must run A.F.H.Q. as the Greeks ran the operations of the Emperor Claudius…" This is an extraordinary view coming from a figure with an education in the classics, given what happened to the Greeks within the Roman world! There is a final criticism. Ward's book has clearly been written over several years; indeed it is perhaps the labor of a lifetime. But a certain lack of energy, or perhaps the publisher's schedule, has meant that far too little attention is given to Brexit: that is, to what is in many ways the culminating episode of the story told here. There were struc-tural considerations at work here that had little to do with Britishness, least of all the feelings of those left out of larger European and global social developments. But Brexit would never have occurred without the imperial illusions of elements of the British upper class—insisting on Britain's ability to "punch above our weight" and naively believing that a world role was available, a part of which was the huge error of assuming that the European Union would cave into British demands.

In the last pages of the book Ward writes that the British world is "endlessly coming to an end." This can be put in different words. Bluntly, the saga of Britishness has not ended. Obviously, the dire consequences of Brexit will remain, although here it just may be the case that a general realization is beginning to dawn that the decision was mistaken. But the stranglehold of the Protestant community in Northern Ireland remains, though just possibly this too may be weakening. None-theless there is no positive view of the future available from any party. The country remains lost, ill at ease with itself, and thus unsure as to how to behave in the world.

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