**The uniqueness of the British**

The uniqueness of the British as a people has long been taken for granted by foreign observers and native commentators alike. Visitors from overseas, from Venetian ambassadors in the late fifteenth century, through intellectuals like Voltaire, to American journalists of the twentieth century, have all been convinced of the special quality of British society. This has been equally assumed by modern native chroniclers of the British scene. But the nature or essence of the Britishness of the British is far easier to proclaim than to explain. Some English characteristics upon which both natives and visitors have tended to agree have to do with national psychology: egoism, self-confidence, intolerance of outsiders, deep suspiciousness towards their compatriots, ostentatious wealth, independence, social mobility, love of comfort and a strong belief in private property. Moderation, the avoidance of extremes, the choice of a middle way, are among the essential qualities of Englishness. The two features of English life which from the 15th I century onwards struck almost every observer were the country's wealth and its strong sense of individualism.

The features that have shaped the British distinctiveness were determined by the country's geographical isolation from the European continent, with the consistent centrality of sea power and a broad social fluidity in which the early collapse of feudalism helped generate a new industry and commercial enterprise. The long centuries during which the land was free from invaders meant that there could be a flowing culture continuity from the time of Chaucer onwards impossible on the war-torn Continent. A political and legal evolution is expressed in the English Parliament which has survived in recognizable form till today, without those interruptions and periods of absolute monarchy that have marked the history of its neighbours, and the rule of law. There have been other significant features in the development of England which mark it as a country to some degree separate from Europe. One of the most important is the language. English is a language of unparalleled richness, subtlety and variety, which unlocks' the treasures of a literature second to none in the world. It is the easiest language to learn.

As for British history, it is not one of harmonious continuity, broadening from epoch to epoch. It is a dramatic, colourful, often violent story of an ancient society and culture torn apart by the political, economic, and intellectual turmoil of human experience. Britain in many ways has been the cockpit of mankind,

**Vocabulary**

ambassador - посол

assume - допускать

proclaim - провозглашать

psychology - психология

self-confidence - самоуверенность

intolerance - нетерпимость

ostentatious - нарочитый, показной

private property - частная собственность

uniqueness -уникальность, своеобразие

social fluidity - социальная подвижность

avoidance - уклонение (от чего-л. ), избежание

extreme - крайность

isolation - изоляция

invader - захватчик

continuity - непрерывность

proceed - продолжать

turmoil - беспорядок

**Questions**

1. What did visitors from overseas and native chroniclers think about the British characteristic features?

2. Who has been convinced of the special quality of British society?

3. What English characteristics have both natives and visitors tended to agree upon?

4. What features of English life struck almost every observer from the 15th century onwards?

5. What shaped the British distinctiveness?

6. What role did the language play in the development of England?

7. How is the history of Britain characterized?