BBC : The Story of English

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Edited with Notes
by
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THE SIGN OF  A GOOD BOOK

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—Tokyo—

'The Mother Tongue'
and
'A Muse of Fire'
from
THE STORY OF ENGLISH

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まえがき

Exceptionally wide-ranging and comprehensive—one of the best overviews of our language.

—Stuart B. Flexner, Editor in Chief, *Random House Dictionary*

This book manages to tell the story of English with masterly comprehensiveness, remarkable clarity and entertaining readability.

—Sir Randolph Quirk, Vice-Chancellor, The University of London

「1500年の英語の歴史が今新たな興奮を呼ぶ」というキャッチフレーズのもとに，1986年9月に BBC は *The Story of English* (全9巻) を教育プログラムとして放映しはじめた．5年もの年月をかけて企画・取材し製作したこのテレビシリーズには結果として膨大な資料が集まった．本書の原本である *The Story of English* (テレビシリーズと同題名) は，その豊富な資料をもとにしてほとんどテレビ製作と平行して書かれたもののようである．放送番組と同様，この *The Story of English* は，専門家に対してではなくあくまでも一般読者を対象としたものだけに，Flexner や Quirk の辞にもある通り，その語り口の平易さと，主題の幅の広さと，題材の展開の手際良さという点において，これまでの類書には見られなかった特色ある試みとなった．カラーおよび白黒の写真，口絵など150枚，カラーのイラスト地図を34枚と，視覚効果を充分に計算しながら，英語世界の概観(第1章)にはじまり，英語の形成，チョーサー，シェイクスピア，新天地アメリカへ渡る英語(第2～3章)，Scots, Irish, Black English の史的状況 (第4～6章)，アメリカでの英語の発達 (第7章)，

オーストラリア，ニュージーランド，南アフリカそしてインドに至るまで世界各地各層に広がった英語(第8～9章)に至るまでを概説したものである．

ここでは，しかし，そのすべてを取り上げることが不可能(全文 Notes を含めて372ページ)なので，大学における教養課程用として適切だと思われる第2章と第3章をとりあげテキストとして組んでみた．第2章(本文第1章)の *The Mother Tongue* では，インド・ヨーロッパ諸語の共通祖語に始まり，ケルト人の存在，アングロ・サクソン人の侵入，英語の形成，ヴァイキングの来寇，ノルマン人の侵攻，英語の復活，そしてチョーサーに至るまでを，豊富なエピソードを取り混ぜて略説する．第3章（本文第2章）の *A Muse of Fire* は，徐々に成長した英語が，Elizabeth 朝で花を開かせ，新天地にまで溢れ出るという，今日世界総人口の5分の2が何らかのかかわり合いを持つに至る英語拡散の第一歩までを記したものであるが，ここでもまた話の主題を巧みに配列し，絵画的効果を大いに高めているという点で，他には見られない「面白さ」がある．

本書は大学の教養課程の学生および一般の読者に対する手際よく簡潔に纏められた「英語物語」にとどまらず，英語・英文学，コミュニケーション論，国際関係論などを専門とする学生にもまた恰好の「英語史」入門書となるであろう．今日の世界状況において果す英語の役割の重要性とその背景を垣間見ることが出来るという点でも十分一読に値する．一読の上さらに興味のある方は，BBC 製作の VIDEO LIBRARY 第2巻 (The Mother Tongue) と第3巻 (A Muse of Fire) をご覧になることをおすすめする．一般の方にはなじみのない古期および中期の英語も，音声としては我々の耳にもそう違和感のないことがわかる．

著者の一人 Robert McCrum 氏は Cambridge 大学および Pennsylvania 大学で教育を受け，小説 *In the Secret State* (1980), *A Loss of Heart*

(1982), *The Fabulous Englishman* (1984) を発表. 氏は BBC テレビ・シリーズ *The Story of English* の発案者でもあり，かつこのシリーズの台本製作を担当した．二人目の著者 William Cran 氏は，Oxford 大学出身で，BBC の TV Current Affairs を担当した後，アメリカ合衆国およびカナダでプロデューサー，ディレクターとしてドキュメンタリーフィルムの製作にかかわる．1981 年 'EMMY' for Outstanding Documentary Journalism を受賞した. 第 3 番目の著者 Robert MacNeil 氏は現在 MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour の編集責任者兼ニュースキャスターであり，これまでもカナダ放送協会や BBC テレビに勤務した経歴をもつ.

注をつけるにあたって，多くの百科辞典，人名辞典，地図類および英語学・英文学関係の資料を参考にさせていただいたが，とりわけ次の辞書類にはお世話になった．書名を記して感謝申し上げる.

1) *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Volumes 1～4) (Nashville; 1962)
2) *The Kenkyusha Dictionary of English and American Literature* 3rd ed. (Tokyo; 1985)
3) *Kenkyusha's New English Japanese Dictionary* 3rd ed. (Tokyo; 1980)
4) *Treasures of Britain* 3rd ed. (Basingstoke, Hampshire; 1976)
5) *Webster's New Geographical Dictionary* (Springfield, Massachusetts; 1984)

編 注 者

CONTENTS

1

THE MOTHER TONGUE

The making of English is the story of three invasions and a cultural revolution. In the simplest terms, the language was brought to Britain by Germanic tribes, the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, influenced by Latin and Greek when St Augustine and his followers converted England to Christianity, subtly enriched by the Danes, and finally transformed by the French-speaking Normans.

From the beginning, English was a crafty hybrid, made in war and peace. It was, in the words of Daniel Defoe, "your Roman-Saxon-Danish-Norman English". In the course of one thousand years, a series of violent and dramatic events created a new language which, by the time of Geoffrey Chaucer, is intelligible to modern eyes and ears without the aid of subtitles.

The English have always accepted the mixed blood of their language. There was a vague understanding that they were part of a European language family, but it was not until the eighteenth century that a careful investigation by a gifted amateur linguist began to decipher the true extent of this common heritage.

"THE COMMON SOURCE"

In the early days of the Raj, Sir William Jones, a British judge stationed in India, presented a remarkable address to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, the fruits of his investigations into ancient Sanskrit. A keen lawyer, Jones had originally intended to familiarize himself with India's native law codes. To his surprise, he

discovered that Sanskrit bore a striking resemblance to two other ancient languages of his acquaintance, Latin and Greek. The Sanskrit word for father, transliterated from its exotic alphabet, emerged as *pitar*, astonishingly similar, he observed, to the Greek and Latin *pater*. The Sanskrit for mother was *matar*; in the Latin of his school days it was *mater*. Investigating further, he discovered dozens of similar correspondences. Though he was not the first to notice these similarities, no one before Sir William Jones had studied them systematically. The Sanskrit language, he announced to the Asiatic Society on that evening of 2 February 1786, shared with Greek and Latin "a stronger affinity . . . than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong, indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists."

1 William Jones, an amateur linguist who stumbled on the roots of English while stationed in India.

2 Jakob Grimm established the important connection between a *p* in Latin (*piscis*) and an *f* in English (*fish*).

Two centuries of linguistic research have only strengthened Jones's basic proposition. We now know that the languages of about one-third of the human race come from this Indo-European "common source". These include the European descendants of Latin, French and Spanish, a great Slavic language, Russian, the Celtic languages, Irish and Scots Gaelic, and the offshoots of German—Dutch and English. A second important breakthrough in the search for the truth about "the common source" came from the folklorist Jakob Grimm, better known, with his brother Wilhelm, as a collector of fairy tales. "Grimm's Law" established beyond question that the German *vater* (and English *father*) has the same root as the Sanskrit/Latin *pitar/pater*. Words such as *me*, *new*, *seven* and *mother* were also found to share this common ancestry. Now the Indo-European basis for the common source was clear.

It is sometimes said that you can deduce the history of a people from the words they use. Clever detective work among some fifty prehistoric vocabularies has now led to a reconstruction of the lifestyle of a vanished people, the first Indo-European tribes, the distant forebears of contemporary Europe. From the words they used—words for winter and horse—it seems likely that the Indo-Europeans lived a half-settled, half-nomadic existence. They had domestic animals, oxen, pigs and sheep, they worked leather and wove wool, ploughed the land, and planted grain. They had an established social and family structure, and they worshipped gods who are the clear ancestors of Indian, Mediterranean and Celtic deities.

Who these people were, and when exactly they lived, is a hotly disputed mystery. According to the Garden of Eden myth, they lived in the fertile crescent of Mesopotamia, but this theory was

exploded by nineteenth-century archaeology. Today, there are some who argue for the Kurgan culture of the Russian steppes, others for the farming culture of the Danube valley. The dates vary from 6000 BC to 4500 BC. The most widely accepted theory locates the environment of the Indo-Europeans in a cold, northern climate in which common words for *snow*, *beech*, *bee* and *wolf* played an important role. Furthermore, none of these prehistoric languages had a word for the sea. From this, and from our knowledge of nature, it is clear that the Indo-Europeans must have lived somewhere in northern central Europe.

Two innovations contributed to the break-up of this Central European society: the horse and the wheel. Some of the Indo-Europeans began to travel east and, in the course of time, established the Indo-Iranian languages of the Caucasus, India, Pakistan and Assam. Others began to drift west towards the gentler climates of Europe. Their descendants are found in Greece, Italy, Germany, and the Baltic. Both the Rhine and the Rhône are thought to take their names from the Indo-European word meaning *flow*. English has much in common with all these languages. A word like *brother* has an obvious family resemblance to its Indo-European cousins: *broeder* (Dutch), *Bruder* (German), *phrater* (Greek), *brat* (Russian), *bráthair* (Irish), and *bhratar* (Sanskrit).

THE CELTS

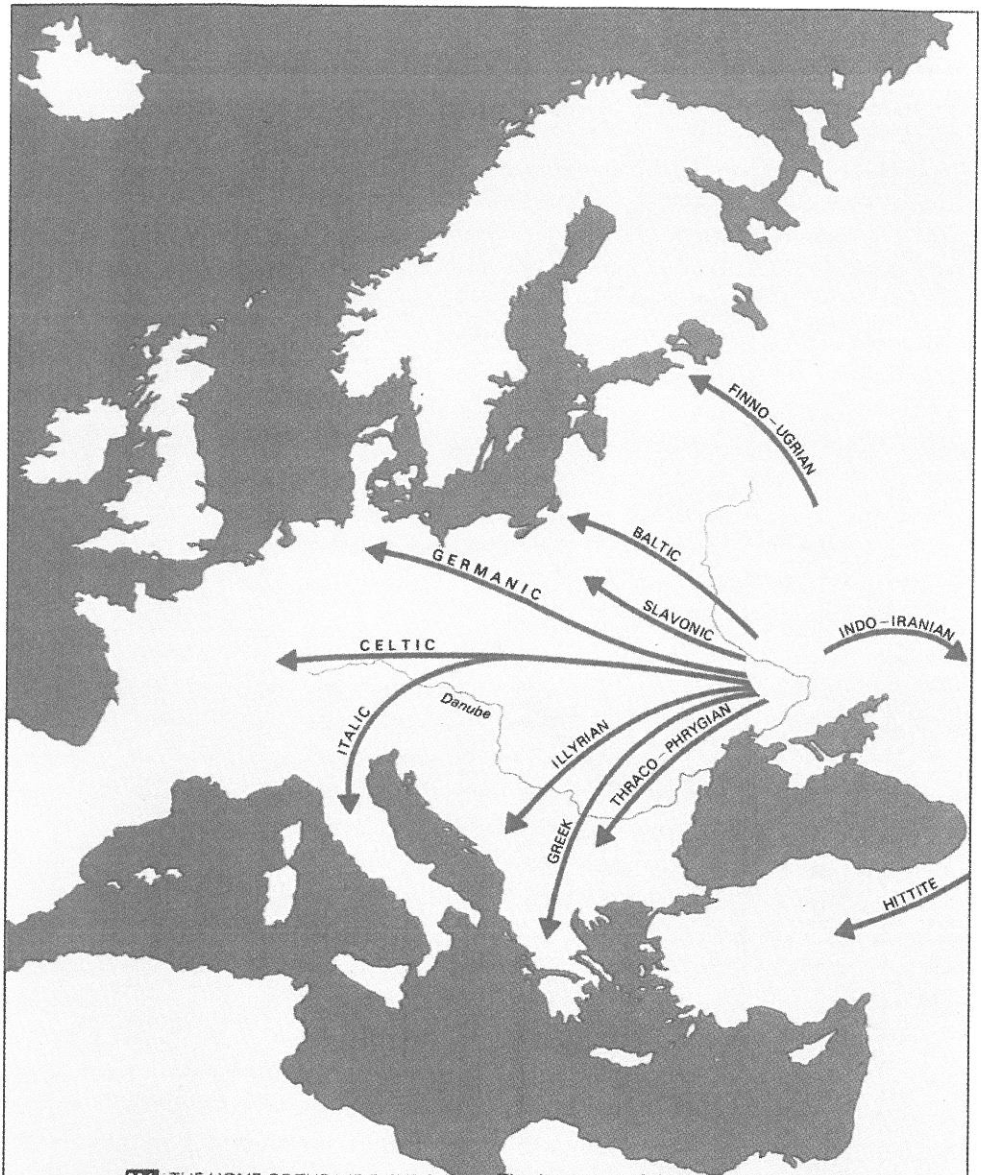
One of the earliest westward migrations was made by a people whose descendants now live in Cornwall, the highlands of Scotland, Ireland, Wales and Brittany: the Celts. These Gaelic-speaking tribes were natives of the British Isles long before the English. Today, the people of Wales prefer to call themselves *cymry*, or "fellow-countrymen", a reminder that they—together

with the Irish, Scots and Cornish—are the true Britons.

The language of Wales—*Cymraeg*—is part of a Celtic family stretching north to the islands of the Hebrides and south to the remoter parts of Brittany. Welsh and Breton, in fact, are very closely related, and the traditional Breton-French onion sellers who used to bicycle through the valleys of Wales every summer were able to communicate with their Welsh-speaking customers.

The Welsh have remained as fiercely independent in words as in deed. The Cambrian mountains, the mountain range that gave the fleeing Britons a refuge from the conquering Anglo-Saxons, isolated the Welsh language from outside influence for centuries. Even at the beginning of the industrial revolution, in which the coal mines of Wales were to play such a vital part, the vast majority of the people still spoke Welsh. In the great social and economic upheavals of Victorian Britain there were some who believed that Welsh culture was being irreparably threatened and they fled to Patagonia. In retrospect, they were unduly alarmist. Despite the anglicizing inroads of intermarriage, education and industrialization, the persistence of Welsh language and culture is remarkable. At the turn of the century, two-thirds of the Welsh were bilingual, and according to a recent census, some 527,600 (or some 20 per cent) still claim to be Welsh speakers.

Today, Welsh language and culture flourish. It is used in education, and it has theoretical equality with English in law and administration. Welsh nationalists have successfully campaigned —like the Quebec separatists—for bilingual road signs. The Welsh language television station, S4C, is popular and successful. The annual Eisteddfod keeps alive an idea of Welsh culture that goes back to the days when their ancestors enjoyed the sovereignty of the island called Britannia. The strength of this Welsh culture



M 1 THE HOME OF THE INDO-EUROPEANS The languages of about one third of the human race have what William Jones called "a common source". (This is why, for example, the Sanskrit word *deva* resembles the English word *divine*.) At some time between 3500 and 2500 BC, the Indo-European community, which was probably based in Central Europe, began to travel east and west. Today, the Indo-European family of languages stretches from the Hebrides in the West to the Indian subcontinent in the East, and includes the descendants of Latin, like French and Spanish, the Slavic language of European Russia, the Celtic languages of Ireland, Wales and Scotland, and the Germanic tongues like Danish, Dutch and English.

has permeated the English spoken in Wales. Eluned Phillips, winner of the Eisteddfod Crown, believes that Welsh-English speakers can always be identified by the lilt of their speech. She remarks that even with Richard Burton, who spoke almost perfect Standard English, his Welsh roots were recognizable in "the melodious lilt of his voice and the sing-song way he used to talk English, the resonance, the rounded vowels—in the music of the language".

The Welshness of the English spoken in Wales also appears in sentence construction. According to Eluned Phillips:

> In Welsh we tend to invert our sentences, perhaps putting the adjective after the noun . . . I was talking to a neighbour the other day. She is from the valleys and we were talking about a young Welshman who had died. What she said to me was, "Pity it was that he died so early", which is really a literal translation of the Welsh . . . We also have a habit of using throwaway words—*like*, *indeed*, *look you*—and I think this originally started because we couldn't finish the translation from Welsh in time. So a word like "indeed" became an important stop-gap.

The Welsh contribution to English literature is also distinctive, and Eluned Phillips believes that this, too, has deep Celtic roots. "You can always tell when a Welshman is writing in English because of the flamboyance of their descriptions. I think that comes down from the old Celtic warriors who used to go into battle [against the Anglo-Saxons] not only with terror in their veins, but with red hot waves of ecstasy."

The Celtic Britons had the misfortune to inhabit an island that was highly desirable both for its agriculture and for its minerals. The early history of Britain is the story of successive

invasions. One of the most famous was the landing of Julius Caesar and his legions in 55 BC. After a difficult start, the Roman Empire kept the British tribes in check—or at any rate at bay—beyond Hadrian's Wall. The evidence of the splendid palace at Fishbourne, near Chichester, suggests that many Celtic Britons became quite Romanized. The poet Martial claimed, with the boastfulness of poets, that his work was read even in the remote island of Britannia. A few Roman words crept, corrupted, into British usage: place-names like Chester, Manchester and Winchester, are derived from the Roman word *castra* meaning a camp. Once the legions withdrew (traditionally in AD 410) and the Empire collapsed, this achievement was threatened. Along the shores of Europe, a new generation of raiders was turning its attention to the misty, fertile island across the water.

The tribes which now threatened the Celtic chiefs of Britain

3 The ancestors of the English-speaking peoples sacrificed to Mother Earth. Some of their victims, astonishingly preserved, are now on show in Denmark.

were essentially Germanic, another branch of the Indo-European migration. After the Celts, the movement of the Germanic people into the Baltic region, Northern Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands produced two more massive branches in the great language tree of Europe. To the north, there were the Norse tongues of Scandinavia; to the south, the family of West Germanic languages. This second branch divided into the High German and the Low German. The first serious historian of these Germans was the Roman writer Tacitus, who gives us the earliest picture of the tribes that became the first Englishmen.

Tacitus was writing near the zenith of the Roman Empire. The armies of Rome were garrisoned across Europe from Britannia to Bucharest, throughout the known world. There was an obvious fascination with the unruly peoples of the North, especially the troublesome ones like the Germans. In his *Germania*, "On the Origin and Geography of Germany", Tacitus makes a colourful evaluation of the character and customs of the tribes that absorbed so much of Rome's political and military power. The Germans, he says, have the virtues Rome has lost. They love freedom; their women are chaste; there is no public extravagance. He characterizes the various tribes. The Tencteri excel in horsemanship, the Chatti have "hardy bodies, well-knit limbs and fierce countenances", the Suebi tie their hair in a knot, and so on. But no picture is perfect. There are, Tacitus writes, seven tribes about whom there is "nothing particularly noteworthy" to say, except that they worship the goddess, Mother Earth, "a ceremony performed by slaves who are immediately afterwards drowned in the lake". One of these seven barbarous tribes was "the Anglii", known to history as the Angles, who probably inhabited the area that is now known as Schleswig-Holstein.

By a curious irony, the savage and primitive rituals of the Anglii have not been entirely forgotten. Peat-water has a curious property. In the nineteenth century, Danish farmers, digging for peat, uncovered the bodies of some sacrificial victims, presumably of the Angles, perfectly preserved in a bog. Known as the *Moorleichen* (swamp corpses), or bog people, they are now on view in a number of Danish museums. One man had been strangled. Another's throat had been cut. They are astonishingly well preserved: you can see the stubble on one man's chin. These leathery corpses are the distant ancestors of the English-speaking peoples.

The speech of the Anglii belonged to the Germanic family of languages. Further south, probably living among the marshy islands of coastal Holland, were the Frisii (Frisians), a raiding people whose descendants still live and farm in the area known as Frisia or Friesland, and speak a language that gives us the best clue to the sound of Anglo-Saxon English. Most people would probably associate Frisia with cows. It is an identification the native Frisians seem proud of. In the central square of the main town, Leeuwarden, where you might expect to find an equestrian memorial to a local hero, there is a larger-than-life statue of a milk-laden cow. Today there are about 300,000 Frisian speakers who travel up and down the dykes and canals, working the flat, marshy land much as their ancestors have done for centuries. The Frisian for cow, lamb, goose, boat, dung and rain is *ko*, *lam*, *goes*, *boat*, *dong* and *rein*. And the Frisian for "a cup of coffee" is *in kopke kofje*.

The similarity between Frisian and English, both with strong Germanic roots, emphasizes how close English is to German, Dutch and Danish. The Germanic echoes in all these languages betray their oldest and deepest roots. And it is no accident that

4 Jean Leroux, a Breton, can converse in Gaelic with his Welsh cousins.

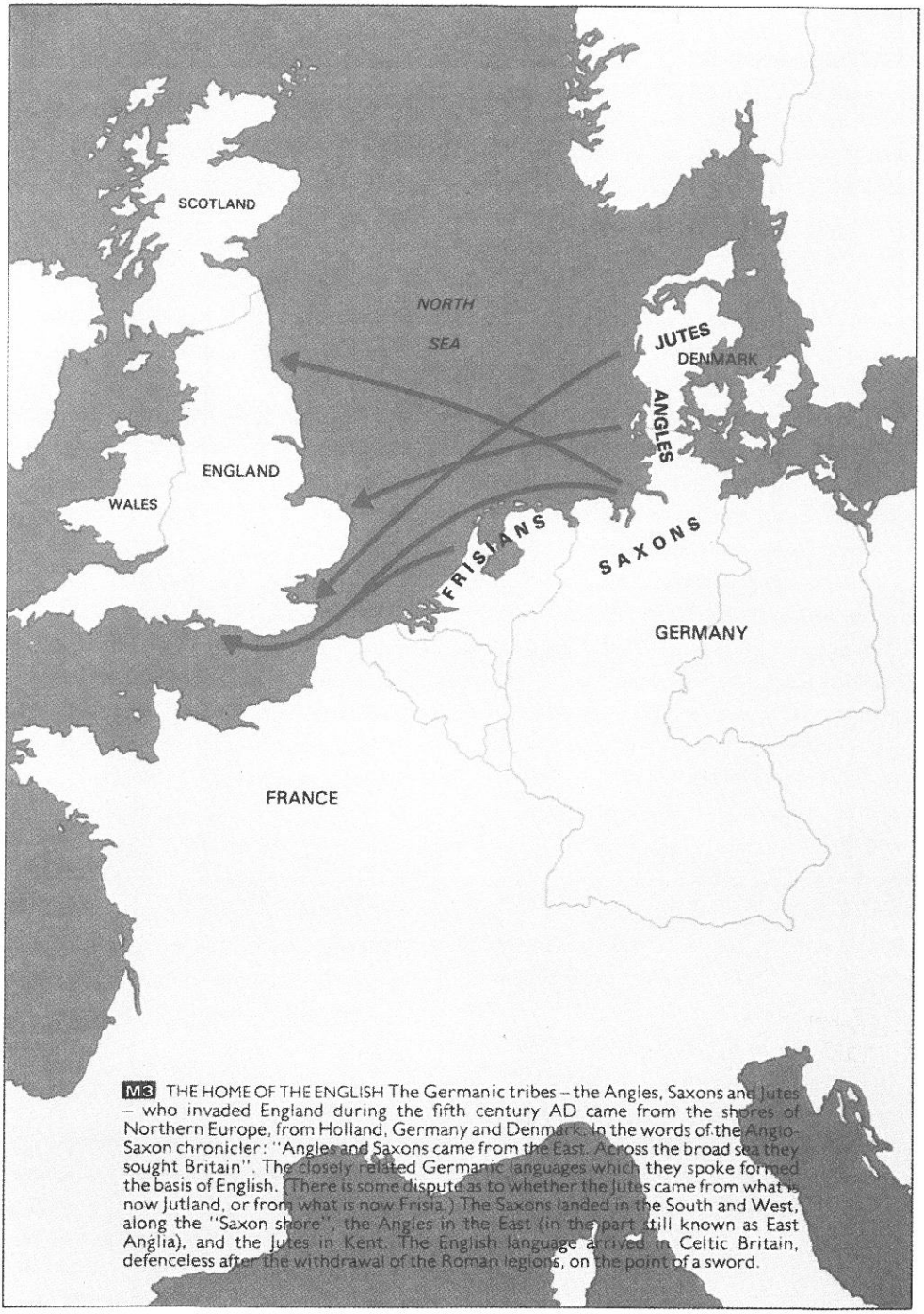
5 Place-names like Avon, Thames, Exe and Wye are a reminder of Britain's Celtic past.

the Dutch, for instance, often seem to speak English with as much ease as the English themselves. The evidence of a place like Friesland suggests that if that linguistic cataclysm, the Norman Conquest of 1066, had not occurred, the English today might speak a language not unlike modern Dutch.

THE MAKING OF ENGLISH

According to their own record of events, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the first invaders of the British Isles—the Angles, Saxons and Jutes—sailed across the North Sea from Denmark and the coastal part of Germany, still known as Lower Saxony, in the year AD 449. By all accounts, they had lost none of their taste for terror and violence. "Never", wrote the chronicler, "was there such slaughter in this island." The native Britons were driven westward, fleeing from the English "as from fire". The English language arrived in Britain on the point of a sword.

The process of driving the British into what is now called the "Celtic Fringe" did not happen overnight. The most successful



M3 THE HOME OF THE ENGLISH The Germanic tribes – the Angles, Saxons and Jutes – who invaded England during the fifth century AD came from the shores of Northern Europe, from Holland, Germany and Denmark. In the words of the Anglo-Saxon chronicler: "Angles and Saxons came from the East. Across the broad sea they sought Britain". The closely related Germanic languages which they spoke formed the basis of English. (There is some dispute as to whether the Jutes came from what is now Jutland, or from what is now Frisia.) The Saxons landed in the South and West, along the "Saxon shore", the Angles in the East (in the part still known as East Anglia), and the Jutes in Kent. The English language arrived in Celtic Britain, defenceless after the withdrawal of the Roman legions, on the point of a sword.

resistance was organized by a *dux bellorum* (as Nennius called him) named Artorius—probably the legendary King Arthur—who managed to establish an uneasy peace for perhaps a generation. In the long run, though, the Anglo-Saxons—"proud war-makers, victorious warriors"—were unbeatable. They put the Britons to flight at places like Searoburgh (Old Sarum) and elsewhere, occupied old Romano-British settlements like Camulodunum (Colchester) and Verulamium (St Albans), and strengthened their control over some of the most fertile parts of the islands. In the course of the next 150 years they set up seven kingdoms (Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Kent, Essex, Sussex and Wessex) in an area which roughly corresponds to present-day England. They called the dispossessed Britons *wealas*, meaning "foreigners", from which we get the word *Welsh*.

The extent to which the Anglo-Saxons overwhelmed the native Britons is illustrated in their vocabulary. We might expect that two languages—and especially a borrowing language like English—living alongside each other for several centuries would borrow freely from each other. In fact, Old English (the name scholars give to the English of the Anglo-Saxons) contains barely a dozen Celtic words. Three of these, significantly, refer to features of the British landscape that the English could not have known in their flat, marshy continental homelands: *crag*, *tor* (a high rock) and *combe* (a deep valley, as in High Wycombe). Another likely borrowing is *puca*, an evil spirit, who eventually turns up as Puck, Shakespeare's mischief-maker.

Place-names tell a similar story. Some modern river names are Celtic, not English (*Avon* means "river"), and some towns have Roman-British names: *Londinium* became London—the Old Irish *lond* means "wild". *Lindum Colonia* became Lincoln, partly derived

from the Welsh *llyn* meaning "lake". *Dubris*—also *dwfr* for "water" in Welsh—became Dover. But most English place-names are English or Danish. When, for instance, the English settled amongst the ruins of *Isurium* they called their town *Aldeburgh*, which means simply Old Town. One or two place-names give a vivid indication of the mutual antipathy, the yawning communication gap that existed between the two sides. Cheetwood in Lancashire is a tautology. *Cheet* is an old Celtic word for "wood". It is as though the English could not be bothered to learn the language of the island they had conquered. Again, in Oxfordshire, there's a place called Brill, which comes from Bre-Hill. Yet *bre* is the Celtic for "hill". Whoever named the place in Old English obviously did not understand even the most common words of the native language. This is a pattern we shall find repeated again when the English language travelled to North America and Australia.

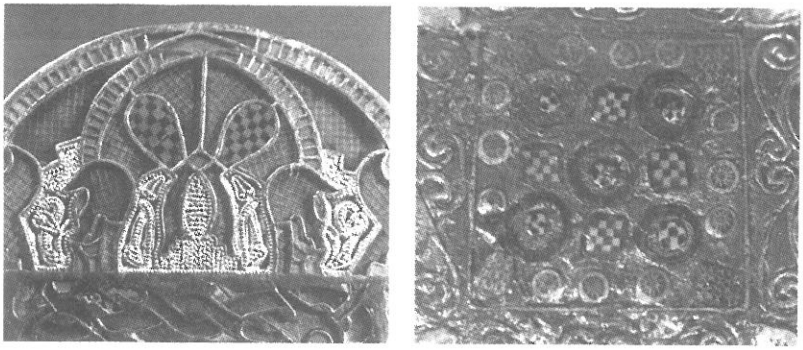
The hostility went both ways. A fragment of an early Welsh folk song tells of a young man going "with a heart like lead" to live in "the land of the Saxons". To this day the gap between the English on the one hand and the Welsh, the Scots and the Irish on the other, is often huge. The Welsh campaign for bilingualism; the Scots proudly retain separate legal and education systems and frequently despise the *Sassenachs*, a Scots Gaelic version of "Saxons"; and the Irish have been at war with the people they now, ironically, call "the Brits" on and off for nearly eight centuries. On the face of it, the English language has been indifferent to the Celts and their influence. Yet the lyrical spirit of the Celts imbues English literature and speech from the earliest ballads to the present day. In the way that some of the greatest Roman poets came from the provinces, many of the finest writers in English—

for example, Swift, Burns, Burke, Scott, Stevenson, Wilde, Shaw, and Dylan Thomas—are of Celtic origin. English speakers have a huge debt to the poetic mind of the Celts, and it was the scattered people of Scotland, Ireland and Wales who took the English language on many of the world journeys we shall be describing.

To the Celts, their German conquerors were all Saxons, but gradually the terms *Anglii* and *Anglia* crept into the language, also referring to the invaders generally. About 150 years after the first raids, King Aethelbert of Kent was styled *rex Anglorum* by Pope Gregory. A century later the Venerable Bede, writing in Latin, composed a history of what he called "The *English* church and people". In the vernacular, the people were *Angelcynn* (Angle-kin) and their language was *Englisc*. By AD 1000, the country was generally known as *Englaland*, the land of the *Angles*.

Gradually, the Anglo-Saxons settled down and began farming their new property. They were an agricultural people. Their art is full of farming, and so is their vocabulary. Everyday words like *sheep*, *shepherd*, *ox*, *earth*, *plough*, *swine*, *dog*, *wood*, *field*, and *work* all come from Old English. After the hard struggle of daily life in the fields, they loved to celebrate, from which come words like *glee*, *laughter* and *mirth*. Not all the words have the same meaning now. *Mirth* used to mean "enjoyment", or "happiness" and even "religious joy". *Merry*, as in Merry Christmas or Merry England, could mean no more than "agreeable" or "pleasing".

It is impossible—unless you go in for tortuous circumlocution—to write a modern English sentence without using a feast of Anglo-Saxon words. Computer analysis of the language has shown that the one hundred most common words in English are all of Anglo-Saxon origin. The basic building-blocks of an English sentence—*the*, *is*, *you* and so on—are Anglo-Saxon. Some Old



6/7 The ornaments found at the ship-burial in Sutton Hoo illustrate the sophistication of Anglo-Saxon culture. The complexity of Anglo-Saxon art is matched by their love of word-play and riddles.

English words like *mann*, *hus* and *drincan* hardly need translation. Equally, a large part of the Anglo-Saxon lexicon—for example, a word like *tungdwitega* meaning "an astrologer"—is, to us, totally incomprehensible. These roots are important. Anyone who speaks or writes English in the late twentieth century is using accents, words and grammar which, with several dramatic modifications, go all the way back to the Old English of the Anglo-Saxons. There is an unbroken continuity from *here* to *there* (both Old English words). When, in 1940, Winston Churchill wished to appeal to the hearts and minds of the English-speaking people it is probably no accident that he did so with the plain bareness for which Old English is noted: "We shall fight on the beaches; we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender." In this celebrated passage, only *surrender* is foreign—Norman-French.

Old English was not a uniform language. From the beginning it had its own local varieties, just as today, on a much larger scale,

the English of California differs from the English of Auckland or of London. The regions of Old English correspond with surprising accuracy to the main varieties of contemporary spoken English in the British Isles. When a Geordie from Newcastle pronounces a word like *path* with a short *a*, or a farmer in Hardy country, in Dorchester for example, burrs his *r*s, the pronunciation is a heavily modified throwback to the local English speech of Anglo-Saxon times. Even the ancient kingdom of Kent, conquered by the Jutes from Jutland, still has a distinct speech-pattern whose origins can be traced back to that first invasion.

The Anglo-Saxons, by all accounts, were very sophisticated in the arts of speech. Theirs was, after all, an oral culture. In the late twentieth century, we work on paper, relying on typewriters, word processors and Xerox machines. If we make an agreement, we insist on seeing it in "black and white". But most Anglo-Saxons would have been unable to read or write—they had to rely on speech and memory. Their oral tradition was highly developed; they enjoyed expressing their ideas in an original, often rather subtle way. They valued understatement, and liked riddles, and poems which went in circles. These preferences suggest a certain deviousness about them, although they also liked to cultivate an air of plain bareness, which is not an unknown art even today.

The Anglo-Saxon love of ambiguity, innuendo and word-play, which remains a distinguishing characteristic of the English language to this day, can be seen very clearly in the collection of Old English verse known as *The Exeter Book of Riddles*. Riddle 69 is simply one line: "On the way a miracle: water become bone." This is ice. Riddle 45 is ostensibly about dough:

I'm told a certain object grows

in the corner, rises and expands, throws up
a crust. A proud wife carried off
that boneless wonder, the daughter of a King
covered that swollen thing with a cloth.

The same love of intricacy and interlacing is obvious in the visual art of the Anglo-Saxons, in their jewellery and their manuscripts. The jewellery discovered by archaeologists excavating the ship-burial of an Anglo-Saxon king at Sutton Hoo shows a mastery of geometric pattern, and provides the visual counterpart to the complicated minds of the first English poets. It is easy to overlook the cultural difficulties facing the Anglo-Saxons. By Roman standards, they did not have a very developed society. But they had lived more or less outside the pale of the Roman Empire and had no experience of "civilization". Everything had to be done for the first time—it was a process of trial and error. Historically, the Anglo-Saxons have had a rather mixed press; but they deserve great credit for the energy and determination with which they developed their own sense of culture.

THE WORDS OF GOD

The civilizing energies of the Anglo-Saxons received an enormous boost when Christianity brought its huge Latin vocabulary to England in the year AD 597. The remarkable impact of Christianity is reported by the Venerable Bede in a story which says as much about the collision of Old English and Latin as it does about the spread of God's word. According to the famous tradition, the mission of St Augustine was inspired by the man who was later to become Pope Gregory the Great. Walking one morning in the market place of Rome, he came upon some fair-haired boys about to be sold as slaves. He was told they came from the island of

Britain and were pagans. "What a pity", he said, "that the author of darkness is possessed of men of such fair countenances." What was the name of their country? he asked. He was told that they were called Angles (*Anglii*). "Right," he replied, "for they have an angelic face, and it is fitting that such should be co-heirs with the angels in heaven. What is the name", he continued, "of the province from which they are brought?" He was told that they were natives of a province called Deira. "Truly are they *de ira*," is the way Bede expresses the future pope's reply, "plucked from wrath and called to the memory of Christ. How is the king of that province called?" They told him his name was Aella. Gregory, who appears to have had an incorrigible taste for puns, said, "Alleluia, the praise of God the Creator must be sung in those parts." Bede says that Gregory intended to undertake the mission to Britain himself but, in the end, he sent Augustine and a party of about fifty monks to what must have seemed like the end of the earth.

Augustine and his followers would have been aware that the tribes they were setting out to convert were notoriously savage. The risk must have seemed almost suicidal. But fortune smiled. Augustine and his monks landed in Kent, a small kingdom which, happily for them, already had a small Christian community. The story of the great missionary's arrival at the court of King Aethelbert is memorably reported by Bede:

> When, at the king's command, they had sat down and preached the word of life to the king and his court, the king said: "Your words and promises are fair indeed; they are new and uncertain, and I cannot accept them and abandon the age-old beliefs that I have held together with the whole English nation. But since you have travelled far, and I can see that you are

sincere in your desire to impart to us what you believe to be true and excellent, we will not harm you. We will receive you hospitably and take care to supply you with all that you need; nor will we forbid you to preach and win any people you can to your religion."

After this, perhaps the earliest recorded example of English tolerance, the liberal-minded king arranged for Augustine to have a house in Canterbury, the capital of his tiny kingdom. He kept his word: Augustine's mission went ahead unhindered.

The conversion of England to Christianity was a gradual process, but a peaceful one. No one was martyred. The mission received a boost in AD 635 when Aidan, a charismatic preacher from the Celtic church in Ireland, independently began the conversion of the north. The twin sources of English Christianity are reflected in the two Old English words for its central symbol, the cross. In the north, there was the Irish version, *cros*. Down south, an earlier, German borrowing, also derived from the Latin *crux*, produced *cruc*. *Cruc* has vanished from the language, though there is a Crutched Friars Street (friars with crosses) in London to this day.

With the establishment of Christianity came the building of churches and monasteries, the corner-stones of Anglo-Saxon culture, providing education in a wide range of subjects. Bede, himself a pupil at the monastery in Jarrow, writes that not only were the great monk-teachers learned "in sacred and profane literature", they also taught poetry, astronomy and arithmetic. The new monasteries also encouraged writing in the vernacular, and all the plastic arts. Astonishing work in stone and glass, rich embroidery, magnificent illuminated manuscripts, were all fostered by the monks, as was church music and architecture.