

## Summary 17: Gilding the Lilies of the Fields

There is not only a genetic divide in Britain between east and west, particularly between English and the non-English but also one of prejudice and ethnic pride. For centuries, the English have relegated the other British to a lower status, attributing to the indigenous people outside England all manner of traits ranging from low intelligence to inherent criminality. In 1850 Robert Knox MD, a London surgeon published a rambling diatribe comparing the Saxons and the Celts in Great Britain, concluding that *The Celtic Race must be forced from this soil. England's safety requires it.* In 1867, Matthew Arnold mounted a defence of Welsh literature against *The Times* which had in one of its leaders damned the Welsh language as the curse of Wales.

In 1773 Samuel Johnson and James Boswell embarked on their celebrated tour of Western Scotland and the Hebrides. In *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, Johnson not only analysed the disintegration of traditional society in the Highlands but he also asserted (correctly) that James Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian* published in 1760 as 'translations from the Gaelic of the poems of a lost bard' were fraudulent. However, *Ossian* proved tremendously influential in Britain and throughout Europe, helping not only to inspire the Romantic Movement but fuelling a romanticised 'revival' of all things Celtic. This gained momentum when the wearing of the tartan, which was outlawed following the defeat of Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745, was un-banned in 1782 and George IV on a visit to Edinburgh in 1822 insisted all Clan Chiefs attend him in traditional attire. Later, Queen Victoria demanded her dinner guests wear tartan dress, caused Balmoral to be built and to go with it, Prince Albert designed the Balmoral tartan for the Royal Family who, being German, did not have a tartan of their own.

Originally, tartans were plaid patterns which, woven with the natural colours of sheep's wool, were the ancient heritage of Celtic speaking tribes throughout Europe before Julius Caesar destroyed their culture (although tartans — and bagpipes — are still found in Portugal, Galicia and parts of the Balkans). In Scotland tartans survived but were banned for so long that the experienced weavers died out before the romantic revival created a new demand. New tartans, many purporting to be 'ancient' were invented — my own Hay tartan, for example is no older than a pattern book *Vestiarium Scoticum* of 1842.

**The myths which separate peoples:** There is a dividing line running from north to south in Britain which separates the older, white-faced breed of sheep in the west from the black-faced, younger breed in the east. Similarly, eastern and south-eastern England has long been separated from the rest of the island by attitudes and values associated with the Anglo-Saxons on the one hand and the Celts or native Britons on the other. Genetically, the Britons are in the majority even in what is regarded as Anglo-Saxon country but because these later immigrants, at least after the Romans left, held power first in Northumbria and later throughout the Danelaw and adjoining territories, the so-called "Teutonic race" came to be regarded as superior. Not all of these Teutonic peoples came in the Dark Ages: there is good argument that the ancestors of many came as refugees when Doggerland sank beneath the North Sea while others had settled on the Saxon Coast even during Roman rule. Using the older nomenclature, most of these people, no matter when they settled in Britain, belonged to Haplogroup I1b as distinct from the native Briton R1b and its association with the Atlantic Modal Haplotype.

So, by the time Robert Knox riled against the Celts, "Teutonic" had a value that "Celtic" did not. It was the culture of the conqueror despite the fact the Saxon "invasion" was superseded by the Norman Conquest in 1066. Although the Normans certainly were a power élite and greatly

changed Britain after their occupation, they did little to alter the genetics of the land. The Normans were originally Vikings, Duke Rollo and his band probably coming from much the same territory as the Teutonic Anglo-Saxons. These Germanic tribes originated in Southern Scandinavia and Schleswig (the Danish peninsula) in the Nordic Bronze Age around 1000–500 BC and expanded south, probably following a decline in the climate of the region around 850-750 BC and another cold spell about 650 BC. These people had learned to extract iron giving them a technological advantage which aided their expansion into the southeast and southwest. By the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC, Roman authors record that Gaul and parts of Italy and Hispania had been invaded by the Germanic tribes. Generally speaking, the Romans seem to have thought more highly of the people of Germania than they did of the Gauls.

While we have some account of the Anglo-Saxon occupation of Britain from both the venomous Gildas and the Venerable Bede, it is from the *The History of the Kings of Britain* published in 1138 AD by Geoffrey of Monmouth that we get most of our information. It is in this that the legendary King Arthur makes his appearance. While Arthur probably never existed, it is worth noting that the magician, Merlin, was a real person, a diplomat and king-maker. The *History* never made it really clear that Arthur had died on the mysterious Isle of Avalon and many believed he will some day return. The Plantagenet kings of England, especially Henry II, sought legitimacy by aligned themselves with King Arthur. Later, Edward I (the *Hammer of the Scots*) let it be known he was the reincarnation of Arthur when he invaded Wales. Henry Tudor, Henry VII, named his heir "Arthur" but the youth died shortly after marrying Catherine of Aragon. His widow was then married to Henry VIII. Later, when Henry wanted a divorce, his ambassador to the Pope indicated that Henry, descendent of Arthur, owed allegiance to no one and could do as he wished. The nationalisation of the Church under Henry VIII and the Protestant Reformation generally demanded a new hero, one from whom Henry and later kings could claim descent. King Alfred was seized upon by James VI of Scotland when he became James I of Britain and thus began the Anglo-Saxon ascendancy. The Germanic or Teutonic people gained power from a remark by the Roman historian Tacitus who claimed that they were not *tainted by intermarriage with other peoples and stand out as a nation peculiar, pure and unique of its kind*. Even Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States, wrote in 1774 that it was the Saxon ancestry of the American colonists that gave them the natural right to build for themselves a free and independent state. The myth of Teutonic — aka Aryan — purity and, in Britain, of Saxon superiority did not survive the genocidal policies of the Nazi Reich.

**The Celtic Revival:** These days the world is full of people, particularly in the USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and anywhere else the "Celtic diaspora" took them, who identify as Celtic. New tartans are invented almost daily (even Australian donkeys have one) while "Celtic" brooches, crosses, spurious heraldic devices, videos of Highland and Irish dancers, CDs of Celtic harp, fiddle and pipe music and coffee-table books of kilted men tossing cabers can be bought at almost any corner store. For Scots there are Clan Societies you can join for just about every clan, "noble family" and sept on the companies register; you can side with one of the most famous football clubs in the world — provided you pronounce "Celtic" in the Latin manner — or if you wish, you can join one of thousands of Pipe Bands anywhere from the Black Stump to up country India. This "Celtic" revival owes much to the Welsh-born director of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, Edward Llyud who in 1707, in his *Archaeologia Britannica* grouped the languages of Wales, Cornwall, Ireland, Scotland and in Brittany together and called them "Celtic". He also labelled the harder-sounding speech of Cornwall, Wales and Brittany as "P-Celtic" and as "Q-Celtic", the softer form of the language spoken in Ireland and western Scotland. However, the Celts themselves do not appear to have used the word and by the time the Romans invaded Britain, even if the indigenous people all spoke what Llyud called "Celtic" languages, the Romans tended to refer to them by their tribal names. Llyud it seems, awoke a sleeping ghost.