广播电视大学英语专业教材

泛读读本

第四册

TVU

ENGLISH

EXTENSIVE READERS

BOOK 4

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第四册

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前　言

本书是江苏电大英语教材编写组编选的英语泛读读本第四册，供广播电视大学英语专业二年级下学期使用。

根据电大英语专业英语阅读教程教学大纲的规定，本册内容以介绍英美两国的文化背景知识为主，包括两国的地理、历史、经济、政治、教育、文化、宗教与生活习俗等基本情况，知识性较强；所选文字材料均出自英美当代书刊，虽经编者删减，但未作改写，语言地道。

为兼顾各方面知识，本书材料取自多种书刊，因此存在着文体上的不够协调和文字难易程度难以控制取齐的现象，请读者注意。此外，所选材料中难免反映原作者的某些资产阶级偏见和观点，虽然编者在编选中有所取舍删节，在注释中也已尽可能有所说明，但不可能面面俱到，一一指出，希望读者对本书所选材料的内容和观点持分析和鉴别的态度。

本书编写体例与注释原则等与本教材前三册相同。

本册教学进度如下：

第一单元(Unit One)供第一至第十周阅读；

第二单元(Unit Two)供第十一至第十八周阅读。

本册主编为黄鹂(南京师大)和佟元晦(江苏电大)。参加编选注释工作的除主编外，还有韦润芳、徐德培(以上江苏电大)和马传新(安徽电大)等同志。受聘在江苏电大工作的美籍语言专家Robert Chase审阅了全部书稿并提出了宝贵的修改意见。

由于时间仓促，水平有限，书中讹错与不妥之处恐在所难免，诚恳希望读者批评指正。

编　者

一九八七年六月

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Background to USA

UNIT ONE

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Chapter 1

The People and the Land They Live in

What is the difference between the British Isles, Britain, the United Kingdom and England? These terms are so often confused that we had better start by distinguishing them.

The British Isles consists of two large islands; one is called Ireland and the other Britain.

Britain, or Great Britain, is the larger of these two islan ds, and it is divided into three parts: Scotland, Wales and England.

The United Kingdom is that part of the British Isles ruled over by the Queen. It consists of Scotland, Wales and England (i.e. the whole of Britain), and also about one-sixth of Ireland, the Northern part. The rest of Ireland is self-governing, as we shall see later. The full title of the United Kingdom is therefore 'The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland'.

The People

England is the largest, most populous, and generally speaking the richest section. We English people take this too much for granted[2], and tend to use the words 'England' and 'English' when we mean 'Britain' and 'British'. This sometimes annoys the Scots and the Welsh. The Scots in particular[3] are very proud of their separate nationality; they have their own legal system, and some of their internal affairs are managed by special Scottish departments, though they have no separate Parliament. The Welsh too do not regard themselves as English, and have a culture and even a language of their own. There is a Welsh Nationalist and a Scottish Nationalist party, demanding a measure of[4] independence from England, but although they have held seats[5] in the House of Commons[6], they are not very strong; and in general[7] the Scots, the Welsh and the English feel sufficiently similar to each other to be quite content to form a combined Parliament in London.

With the Irish, the question is more complicated and much less happy. Ireland became part of the United Kingdom in 1801, but it soon grew discontented, and for forty years the 'Irish Question' was the greatest headache[8] of the British Parliament. At last, after much bloodshed, Ireland divided itself into two: Northern Ireland remained loyal to the Crown[9] (though it has its own Parliament sitting in Belfast for internal affairs), and in 1922 the rest of

the country broke away to form an Irish Free State, later called Eire (pronounced Aira) and now the Republic of Ireland.

The Republic of Ireland is almost entirely Roman Catholic; it does not regard itself as British, and is not now even a supporter of the Commonwealth. [10] Unlike the major Commonwealth countries it did not lift a finger [11] to help Britain in the Second World War. It is still discontented, as it resents the existence of Northern Ireland, and wants the whole of Ireland to be a republic.

Are the British people Europeans? This may seem a strange question to Africans and Asians, who tend to think of all white men as Europeans. But the British, *when they are in Britain,* do *not* regard themselves as Europeans. The Europeans, to them, are those rather excitable foreigners from the other side of the English Channel,who have never learnt how to speak English. Europe is 'the Continent': a place full of interest for British tourists, but also the source of almost all the wars in which Britain has ever been involved. Thus, although geographically speaking Britain is a part of Europe, yet the fact that it is a separate island has made its people feel very, very *insular.* They feel, and in many ways are, different from the rest of Europe, and they sometimes annoy continental nations by failing to support them, or even to understand them, in time of need. [12]

Where did the British people come from? This is an

extraordinarily interesting question, since they are a mixture of many different races, and all these races invaded Britain at various times from Europe. Nobody knows very much about Britain before the Romans came during the first century B.C., but there had been at least three invasions before that. The first of these was by a dark-haired Mediterranean race called the Iberians.[13] The other two were by Celtic tribes:[14] first the Gaels,[15] whose descendants are the modern Scots and Irish, some of whom still speak the Gaelic language; and secondly the Britons, [16] who gave their name to the whole island of Britain. These were the people whom the Romans conquered. The Romans gave the Britons a good deal of their civilisation, but they never settled in Britain in very large numbers, so the British race survived until the overthrow of the Roman Empire by the 'barbarians', i.e. the numerous Germanic tribe[17] which overran the whole of Western Europe.

There were three great Germanic tribes which invaded Britain: the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes,[18] and together they form the basis of the modern English race. The Britons, as a race, disappeared except in Wales and Cornwall. Many Welsh people still speak their 'British', i.e. Celtic, tongue, which is called Welsh. In Cornwall the language has died out,[19] though it can still be recognised in some proper names, The Angles were so numerous that the country was called Angle-land, i.e. England, and the Anglo-Saxon language was Old English: in other words,

modern English has descended directly from it.

So far then, we have noted the Iberians, two kinds of Celts, the Romans, and the Germanic peoples, which we shall call collectively the Saxons; but the story is by no means[20] ended. A few hundred years later a further invasion took place from the North-East, that of the Danes, and the whole North-Eastern half of Eagland became for a long time Danish territory. Finally, and even more important, there came the great Norman[21] invasion. The Normans were 'North-men', and like the Danes had come originally from Scandinavia in the North-East; but they had settled in part of Northern France, still known as Normandy, and adopted the French language. In the year 1066, Duke William of Normandy claimed the English throne,[22] and after defeating and killing the Saxon king Harold at the Battle of Hastings, he went on to conquer the whole country, and to merit the name of[23] William the Conqueror.[24] He was crowned William I of England, and our present Queen is one of his descendants. The Saxons became a subject people,[25] and all the most important noblemen were Normans. English was the language of the common people and Norman French was the language of the aristocracy, including the King and his court. Even today, many French expressions occur in traditional ceremonial language, and a few English people feel proud if they can prove that their ancestors were Normans. Eventually, however, the speech of the common people

prevailed, and the use of French died out: but the common people had already absorbed some of it, and many everyday expressions in English have a French origin.

There has never been another invasion of Britain in the 900 years since William the Conqueror, so that all the various elements[26] have had time to settle down and form one people. As a whole,[27] the British are proud of their diversity, and like to think that it has given them a diversity of qualities which has turned out to their advantage.[28]

The country they live in, that is, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, has an area of about 93,000 square miles. This is remarkably small when you consider its population and its importance in world affairs, but the actual number of square miles will mean little unless you compare it with the area of your own country. Ghana, Uganda and Guinea are each about the same size as the United Kingdom; so, in Asia, are Laos and Korea. These are, of course, tiny compared with vast countries like the United States of America, Russia, India and China.

The population of the United Kingdom is about 55,500,000: once again this should be compared with the population of your own country. It is a very large population for such a small area, and yet it is very unevenly distributed. About 8,000,000 people are crowded into the London area alone,and most of the rest live in a few densely popula-

ted industrial areas. On the other hand, there are some quite large tracts of barren, hilly country, especially in Northern Scotland, which are almost uninhabited. The reason for this unevenness is that Britain is mainly an industrial country, and most of the people live in large towns. Apart from London, there are two towns containing over a million people each (Birmingham and Glasgow), four with half-a-million or more, and over forty others with more than a hundred thousand people each.

Town

What are the towns like? Most have grown up without much planning during the last hundred years. The streets are rarely straight, and often much too narrow for the heavy traffic travelling through them. Each town contains one or more main shopping districts, which are sometimes quite attractive, with fine large shops, restaurants and office buildings, crowded with people; and the numicipal centre too (i.e. the council offices and other buildings) is often specially laid out,[29] and may be very handsome in a quieter, more dignified way. The factories are often grouped in large 'estates',and some towns are notorious for the smoke which pours from the factory chimneys and pollutes the whole atmosphere.Apart from this, the towns are on the whole[30] remarkably clean. Sewage is always led away in underground pipes,and refuse is collected regularly from each house.There are no open drains. Rainwater flows

along the gutters at the edge of the roadway until it comes to a drain, where it falls down into underground channels called sewers. The gutter and the roadway are separated from the pavement (i.e. the broad paved pathway for pedestrians) by a step called the kerb, a few inches high.

The residential districts of the town vary enormously. Some are old, poor and dirty. Other residential districts are much more spacious and attractive.

Unfortunately, districts like this are very wasteful of space. Quiet unending roads of monotonous semi-detached houses extend further and further away from the edge of the town, swallowing up the once-attractive landscape.[31] London has many square miles of this kind of scenery, known rather contemptuously as 'suburbia'. One alternative to this is to build blocks of flats, where people live in separate apartments but use a common entrance and staircase. Some of these blocks are extremely ugly, others are pleasantly designed amid well-kept lawns and gardens. On the whole, however, English people are too fond of privacy and independence to like living in flats.

Some of the smaller, older towns of Britain, especially those which have avoided excessive industrialisation and commercialisation, have real charm. They often contain interesting ancient buildings, which have survived because they were well built in the first place and because they were felt to be fine enough to merit careful maintenance.[32]

It may be a magnificent cathedral, or an ancient gateway, a row of old houses or a halfrunied castle, a curious monument, or a section of Roman wall. Whatever it is, it may possess that strange charm and dignity peculiar to old age which we describe as 'quaint' or 'picturesque'[33]. This, it should be noticed, is a special feautre of Europe. You will not find it in many emergent countries, since they have not yet been able to establish this kind of living record of their history; and even America, with its extremely high level of development, is a very young nation, and it envies Europe for owning these and other reminders of its ancient past.

Country

So much for the towns. Now we come to rural Britain—the real Britain, some may feel, since it is Britain at its most natural.[34] The system of fields is typical of most of Europe, and reflects the intense cultivation of many centuries. The lines dividing one field from the next are hedges, though sometimes there may be a fence or even a wall or ditch instead of a hedge. One farm usually consists of several such fields, the size of which can be roughly estimated. The greater part of England is divided up into fields like this, scattered with pleasant woods—all that is left of the natural forests which covered Britain in the remote past. Apart from the towns, the only areas which interrupt the field system are the unproductive moors and heaths, espe-

cially on the hill-tops; and in England which is a relatively flat, fertile, well-watered land, these moorlands are not generally extensive.

This, the fields, woods, streams and hills, is the kind of scenery English people think of when they talk of the 'country' as opposed to the 'town'. The word 'bush' is never used in this sense in Britain. English townspeople think of the country as a beautiful peaceful place where they can retreat at week-ends or in the holidays from the rush and harshness of twon life. The roads through the countryside are all tarred, and it you wish to leave the road the land is easy to penetrate since the vegetation consists of short grass, and the undergrowth is never dense. The largest wild animal is the shy and gentle deer, and there are no dangerous beasts of any kind, except an occasional well-guarded domestic bull. There is only one kind of poisonous snake, the adder, which most British people have never seen; malaria does not exist, and the sun is seldom uncomfortably hot, nor are there any violent storms or downpours of rain. The 'country' is therefore loved, not feared: this will help you to understand the important place that nature has held in English literature since the eighteenth century. But the astonishing thing is that this 'natural' beauty is mostly man-made. The peacefulness of the country is the result of man's 'taming' it: it is man who has cleared the forest to give us these pleasant views, it is man who has made the fields and sown the crops, controlled

the streams and domesticated or destroyed the wild beasts. This is the result of pre-industrial civilisation. But industrial civilisation is now threatening the countryside: the towns take up[35] more and more land; waste products from factories are dumped into rivers, and make them polluted and dirty; and the chemicals used by farmers to kill insects and improve the crops are destroying many wild animals and birds.

The villages are an essential part of the countryside. Admittedly, most British people prefer not to live in one because of the lack of amenities, and some are less attractive to look at than others; but in general English people like villages for the same reason as they like the country: because they are peaceful and because the best of them possess the charm of being natural and unspoilt. They are always well-built permanent settlements with their own history, which may be recorded in the parish archives, and reflected in the ancient parish church. The latter is usually the most conspicuous and interesting building, with architecture going back perhaps a thousand years or even more. Some villages also boast of[36] an inn, which may be hardly less attractive and ancient than the church. Thatched cottages are unfortunately becoming less common nowadays, and the art of thatching is declining, but there are still plenty of examples which add to the beauty of many villages.

Thus, if there were ever any evil spirits in England, they have long since retired to the wilder moorlands