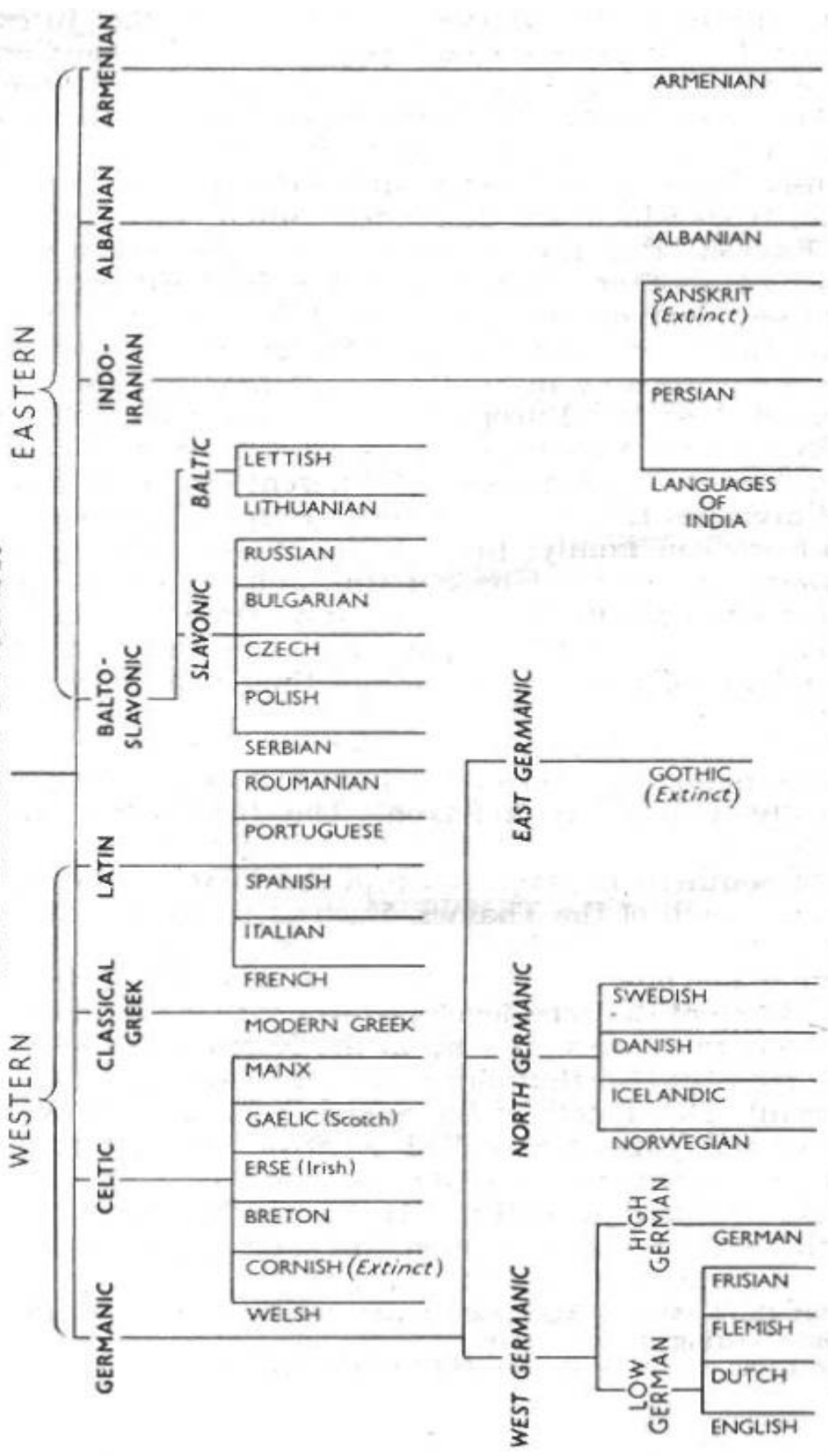


## the Anglo-saxon Invasions

The story of English in England, therefore, begins in the first half of the fifth century when the invaders came, the Angles from Schleswig, the Saxons from Holstein, the Jutes from Jutland. The language they all spoke belonged to the Germanic speech family. This in turn was separated into three main families: East Germanic, which died out with Gothic about the eighth century; North Germanic, which developed into Swedish, Norwegian, Danish and Icelandic; and West Germanic, from which are descended Dutch, Flemish, Friesian and English. But the Germanic languages are merely one branch of another great family, the Indo-European, which comprises most of the languages of Europe and India. The parent Indo-European language began several thousands of years BC, probably in south Europe near the Asian border. It spread West into Europe and East into India, splitting and modifying into various forms as it spread and came into contact with other languages of different origin. As a result of these divisions there are two main groups of languages in the Indo-European family: there is the Western group, containing Germanic, Celtic, Greek, Latin; and there is the Eastern group containing Balto-Slavonic, Indo-Iranian, Albanian and Armenian. The next chart will show the modern descendants of Indo-European and their relationship to each other.

# INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES



The language that these invaders of England spoke was a west Germanic member of the Indo-European languages. We generally term it 'Anglo-saxon'. The Jutes settled in Kent, Southern Hampshire and the Isle of Wight; the Saxons in the rest of Southern England south of the Thames; the Angles in the land north of the Thames. Each of the three tribes spoke a different form of their common language, and so in England ('Britain' had now become 'Englaland', 'the land of the Angles') three different dialects developed – or rather four dialects, for very soon two forms grew up in the North, one spoken north of the Humber (Northumbrian), the other south of the Humber (Mercian). The dialect of the Saxons was called West Saxon, that of the Jutes was called Kentish. At first it was the Northumbrian with its centre at York that developed the highest standard of culture. It was in Northumbria in the eighth century that Caedmon, the first great English poet, wrote his poetry, and it was into Northumbrian that the Venerable Bede translated the Gospel of St. John. Then for a time under Alfred the Great (848-901), who had his capital in Winchester and who encouraged learning in his Kingdom and also was himself a great writer, West Saxon became pre-eminent until Edward the Confessor held his court not in Winchester but in Westminster. Then London became the capital of the country; and from Mercian, the dialect spoken in London – and at Oxford and Cambridge – came the standard English that we speak today. But the language of England in the time of Alfred bears little resemblance to the language of today.

Anglo-saxon or English was an inflected language, but not so highly inflected as Greek, Latin or Gothic. Thus there were five cases of nouns (Nominative, Vocative, Accusative, Genitive, Dative), 'strong' and 'weak' declensions for adjectives (each with five cases); there was a full conjugation of verbs—complete with Subjunctive—and there was a system of grammatical

gender. So in Old English hand was feminine, fot (=foot) was masculine, but heafod (=head) was neuter; wif (=wife) was neuter, but wifman (= woman) was masculine; daeg (= day) was masculine but niht (= night) was feminine.

Most of that has changed. In modern English, as you have seen, grammatical gender of nouns has completely disappeared, adjectives no longer 'agree' with their nouns in number, case and gender, nouns have only two cases, verbs very few forms and the subjunctive has practically disappeared. Most of these changes were caused, or at any rate hastened, by the two other invasions of England.