gaudet." "A screech-owl at midnight," says Addison, "has alarmed a family more than a band of robbers." The terror was traditionary. "The bird of night" was ever an evil bird; and no Roman superstition entered more completely into the popular belief, and was more referred to by the historians and the poets. Indications such as these of the influences of the obscure past may be as trustworthy records as half obliterated inscriptions. They enable us to piece out a passage or two in the history of a people.

CHAPTER IV.

Introduction of Christianity.—Persecution of Diocletian.—St. Alban.—Constantine.—Church in Britain.—Extortions and cruelties of the notary Paulus.—Irruption of the Scots and Picts.—Maximus.—British colony of Armorica.—Assertion of independence by Britons and Armoricans.

An ancient chronicler of Dover Castle says,—"In the year of Grace, 180, reigned in Britain, Lucius. He became a Christian under Pope Eleutherius, and served God, and advanced Holy Church as much as he could. Amongst other benefits, he made a church in the said Castle, where the people of the town might receive the sacraments."* The remains of some ancient church, constructed of Roman materials, if not of Roman work, are still to be seen within the area of Dover Castle. The ruins, and the traditions which belong to them, are no sufficient evidence that here is the church of Lucius; nor is the record of the Dover chronicler and other annalists of much more value as to the period of the introduction of Christianity into Britain, or of the instruments of the Divine will by whom it was introduced. Tertullian, at the beginning of the third century, says that Britain had received the faith of Christ. The extent of its reception at that early date is very doubtful.

But if the statements of the ancient British writers, as to the adoption of Christianity by Lucius, or Lever Maur (the great light), are deficient in that precision which constitutes historical authenticity, there is ample evidence that a Christian church of some importance was established in Britain at the beginning of the fourth century. At the first Council of Arles, in 314, three British bishops are recorded to have been present, and to have asserted opinions in some degree differing from those of the Romish Church. Constantine was then Emperor. He, the son of Constantius, by an English mother, Helena,—born in Britain—raised to the imperial power by the affection of the army in Britain, in 306,—would necessarily afford every encouragement to the propagation of the faith which he had himself adopted. But, a few

* Quoted in Dugdale—Account of the Nunnery of Saint Martin.

years before, the spread of Christianity had been fearfully interrupted by the persecutions under Diocletian and Maximian. To this period of fiery trial belongs the history of the British protomartyr, Alban. Milton treats this passage of our annals with characteristic brevity:—"Diocletian, having hitherto successfully used his valour against the enemies of his empire, uses now his rage in a bloody persecution against his obedient and harmless Christian subjects: from the feeling whereof, neither was this island, though most remote, far enough removed. Among them here who suffered gloriously, Aron, and Julius of Caerleon-upon-Usk, but chiefly Alban of Verulam, were most renowned: the story of whose martyrdom, soiled and worse martyred with the fabling zeal of some idle fancies, more fond of miracles than apprehensive of truth, deserves not longer digression." The legend of Saint Alban, as told by Bede, has much of what in these days we may call "fabling zeal;" but, nevertheless, in his beautiful and simple narrative, we may recognise much that is "apprehensive of truth." The celebrity of Alban was recognised by an Italian poet of the sixth century, before Bede wrote in the eighth. Deduct from Bede's narrative the miraculous drying-up of the waters of the river to allow the martyr's passage, and the sudden gushing out of a spring to afford him drink, and we have a consistent relation, which presents what we may well believe to be an accurate historical picture of the individual persecution of a British Christian before a Roman tribunal bent upon enforcing the heathen worship. Alban was a Pagan, says Bede, at the time when the persecution began; and receiving into his house a certain priest, who was flying from the oppressors, was converted by his piety, and became a Christian in all sincerity of heart. When the hiding-place of the fugitive was discovered, Alban disguised himself in the clerical gown which his guest had worn, and was led bound before the Roman magistrate. The sacrifice to friendship was perfected by the stripes and death of the "self-offered victim," who boldly declared himself: "My name is Alban, and I worship the only true and living God, who created all things." He was delivered to the lictor; but the man was so moved by the fortitude of the Christian, and by the miraculous circumstances attending his progress, that he refused to perform his bloody office. Another executioner was found, and the two perished together. Bede has described the locality of this scene with an exactness which was evidently derived from personal observation of the hill of St. Alban's, whose gentle slopes, clothed

with flowers, delighted the imagination of the venerable monk of Jarrow.

The civil government of Britain was remodelled by Constantine. The province was placed under the jurisdiction of the prefect of the Gauls; and his deputy, who bore the title of Vicar of Britain, resided at York. Under him were presidents of each of the four great divisions of the island. The military administration of the country was separated from the civil, and was confided to three officers, whose titles of Count and Duke have descended to modern ages. Constantine died in the year 337; but the internal tranquillity of the island was little disturbed for half a century after the persecution of the Christians had ceased. We have no record during this period of the comparative prevalence of the old British superstitions; of the rites of Pagan Rome; or of the Christian worship. But, even at this early period, the Church in Britain partook of the doctrinal contentions that in all periods have interfered with the general reception of the great fundamental principles of the religion of Christ. Whilst the Romanised Britons were giving a cold and qualified adherence to the divinations and sacrifices of temples raised to Diana and Apollo, and some converts to a nobler creed indignantly cast away their household deities;* and whilst the ancient votaries of Druidism were gradually adapting themselves to a faith, to which, in the doctrine of a future life and of a supreme judge, their own had some faint relation, the differences of the Romish and Eastern Churches about the celebration of Easter, and the violent opposition of the Arian and the more orthodox creed, penetrated into these regions so far removed from the disputes of the great Councils. At a later period the contests about points of doctrine became more strenuous; and we may in part attribute to these dissensions the remarkable circumstance that, during two centuries, the Christian creed was entirely swept away by Saxon heathendom; and that not only the names of Arius and Athanasius, which were familiar in the fourth century, were forgotten, but that the great fact recorded by Chrysostom at the end of that century,—that the Britannic isles had felt the power of the Word, and that "churches and altars had been erected,"—had passed away, like "an insubstantial pageant faded." But amidst these polemical conflicts, which were probably more agi-

* The small figures found in the bed of the Thames, at London, are supposed to have been thrown there by some of the more zealous converts to Christianity, who thus rejected their *Penates*.

tating the ecclesiastics than disturbing the people, the healing and humanising doctrines of Christianity were operating to produce the tranquillity and prosperity which seemed to have belonged to Britain in the days of Constantine and his immediate successors. The Church had, to some extent, become a power; and in producing a comparative equality amongst the populations of the island—Roman, British and Teutonic,—it had mitigated many of the oppressions of a military despotism, and partially cemented the heterogeneous elements of society into the materials for forming a nation. There is a dramatic incident, however, belonging to the time of Constantius, the son of Constantine, which shows how the government of a province may be administered, so as to become an instrument of official cruelty and rapacity. The story is told very circumstantially by Ammianus Marcellinus, who flourished within a quarter of a century of the period. In the year 350, Magnentius, whose father was a Briton, aimed at the supreme power of the Western empire; and his conspiracy was favoured by some portion of the army in Britain. Paulus, a Spaniard, was sent by Constantius to search out the offenders against his power. The revolt had been put down, and Magnentius slain; but Paulus came with his delegated authority to revel in all the abominations which avarice can inflict when it clothes itself in the robes of justice. What the judge Jefferies was to England in the seventeenth century, the notary Paulus was in the fourth century. Wherever there was wealth to be plundered, there was the accuser. At the tribunal of Paulus innocence was no protection, if the victim was worth the trouble of being hunted out of life. The pro-prefect, or vicar of Britain, Martinus, opposed the unjust judge. But he was destined to be involved in the general proscription of the rich and powerful. Driven to despair, he drew his sword upon the notary; but, missing his blow, he plunged the weapon into his own heart. There was no barrier then to the ravages of the tyrant; and Constantius applauded the executions and the tortures, the confiscations and the banishments, which were inflicted by his atrocious instrument. Julian, the succeeding emperor, commanded Paulus to be burnt alive.

There were troubles now coming upon the fertile provinces which were more fatal than the occasional misgovernment of the imperial authorities. Those who ultimately had a considerable share in destroying the Roman civilisation, when its military strength was wholly withdrawn from Britain, now ventured to assail it when its defences were only weakened. In the year 360,

the tribes whom we call Picts and Scots entered the provinces within the wall of Hadrian in considerable numbers. "It is remarkable," says an acute and learned historian, "that, from this period, the Caledonians and Maætæ, tribes which for two centuries had been the terror of the civilised Britons, disappear, without any ostensible cause, from the page of history." Dr. Lingard, from whom we quote, considers that the Picts were, under a new denomination, the very same people. Dr. Lappenberg speaks of the near relation of both these tribes to the Caledonians and Maætæ; and he adds, "it is certain that the Scots, and probably the Picts likewise, passed over from Ireland, and reduced the earlier inhabitants to subjection." The Scoti, who were undoubtedly Irish, ultimately gave their name to North Britain. These tribes, then, grown powerful in the fourth century, had gradually made inroads upon the Southern provinces; and, in the year 368, had carried their devastations as far as London. The Roman bands had given way before them, and their leaders had been slain. At length the great general, Theodosius, came over from Gaul with a considerable force, and drove back the marauders beyond the wall of Antoninus. The garrisons were re-established; the civil administration was reformed; and Britain once more appeared likely to return to the safety and peace of the preceding half century.

In the army of Theodosius was a leader named Maximus, of a distinguished British family. He had acquired high honour by his skill and bravery in the expulsion of the Scots and Picts; and was ultimately proclaimed by the army, emperor of Britain. He was probably supported by the British races, who prevailed, without much admixture, in Wales and Cornwall. In an evil hour he quitted the security of his island empire, and aspired to found a new continental branch of the Roman dominion. He was ultimately defeated and put to death in 388. During his five years of struggling power large numbers of the British had followed his fortunes in Gaul; and, after his fall, they refused to return to their native country. The old chroniclers, Gildas, Bede, Nennius, and Henry of Huntingdon, distinctly connect the settlement of a Roman-British colony in Gaul with the period of the usurpation of Maximus. Gildas says, "New races of tyrants sprang up in terrific numbers; and the island, still bearing its Roman name, but casting off her institutes and laws, sent forth among the Gauls that bitter scion of her own planting, Maximus, with a great number of followers." He then recites the actions of this British leader, and

adds, "After this, Britain is left deprived of all her soldiery and armed bands, of her cruel governors, and of the flower of her youth, who went with Maximus, and never again returned." William of Malmesbury puts the settlement of a British colony in Gaul at an earlier date—the time of Constantine. Some historians, on the other hand, consider that the immigration of the insular Britons into the country which received their name, Brittany, took place after the Saxon invasion. The story of Conan, the British chief, who led his followers to the walls of Paris, and there fought with Maximus against Gratian, is circumstantially told in the histories of Brittany by D'Argentré and by Daru. Maximus and Conan separated. The British chief carried his legions to Armorica, where he founded that colony which for so many centuries had an intimate connection with Cornwall and Wales; where the same language as that of its Britannic founders was long spoken; which was a safe retreat for all who were harassed by Pict or Sea-King; and in which the great deeds of the British Arthur entered into the traditions of the people long after the Saxon rule in England had obliterated them. The hilly regions and craggy shores of Brittany had many points of resemblance to the mountains of Wales and the coasts of Cornwall; and they were each fitted for the abode of an enthusiastic race, equally brave; united by the same traditions which they derived from that ancient bardic order which was a part of Druidism; and each retaining many of the superstitions of their early faith, even amidst the rites of Christianity.

There is nothing in the story of the establishment of the British colony of Armorica, in the time of Maximus, that is in the least inconsistent with the subsequent history of Britain, as related by authorities who have secured more general confidence than the old British writers. The emigration to the western shores of Gaul may not have been so numerous as some believe, who put the number of armed warriors at a hundred thousand; but that there was a decided weakening of the military strength of the country, towards the end of the fourth century, is very manifest. The hordes of Alaric were overrunning Italy. When the remote British province was harassed by its fierce enemies from the Grampian mountains, and from the more dangerous neighbourhood of Galloway and Dumfries-shire, sometimes the Roman soldiers could be spared for their succour, and the invaders were driven back. When the Roman legions were recalled, the untiring enemies again came. The island was harassed within as well as from without. Pretenders

to a sovereign power in the Roman province were set up, and as quickly deposed. Marcus and Gratian were rulers for a few months. Constantine, a soldier raised from the ranks, had a somewhat longer tenure of power; but leaving Britain, to carry on a more extended resistance to the Emperor Honorius, the Britons threw off their allegiance to the Roman authority, and by one vigorous effort repelled their fierce assailants by their own strength. Zosimus, the historian, records these events, as well as the concurrent establishment of an independent government by the Armoricans. "The neglect of Constantine," he says, "compelled both the inhabitants of the Britannic island, as well as some of the Celtic nations, to revolt from the empire of the Romans, and to live independent of them, no longer obeying their laws. The people, therefore, of Britain, taking up arms, and defying every danger, freed their cities from the invading barbarians. And the whole Armoric and other provinces of Gaul, imitating the Britons, liberated themselves in like manner, expelling the Roman præfects, and setting up a civil policy according to their own inclination.

Here, then, in the year 409, was our England an independent state. In the Anglo-Saxon chronicle,—the curious but meagre record of early events, which is supposed to have existed in the time of Alfred, and even to have been partly compiled by that great king,—there is the following entry, which singularly agrees with the chronology of Greek and Latin historians:—"A. 409. This year the Goths took the city of Rome by storm, and after this the Romans never ruled in Britain, and this was about eleven hundred and ten years after it was built. Altogether they ruled in Britain four hundred and seventy years since Caius Julius first sought the land." The chronicler adds, under the year 418, "This year the Romans collected all the treasures that were in Britain, and some they hid in the earth, so that no one has since been able to find them, and some they carried with them into Gaul." Bede has the same account of the duration of the Roman rule. Procopius, who flourished in the sixth century, relating the defeat of Constantine and his son by Honorius, says, "The Romans no longer had it in their power to recover Britain; so that from this time it remained subject to usurpers." Gibbon recognises the value of these authorities, and observes, "Yet our modern historians and antiquaries extend the term of their dominion; and there are some who allow only the interval of a few months between their departure and the arrival of the Saxons." This theory of the date of the Roman

dominion and the commencement of the Saxon, has arisen from the too common practice of dividing our history into great epochs, separated by imaginary lines from what has gone before and what is to come after. On the contrary, all great revolutions depend upon that social condition in which there is never any sudden change, but in which the most important changes do take place by almost imperceptible degrees. In the next chapter we shall briefly trace the social condition of England in the obscure interval between the Roman and the Saxon supremacy, in the first half of the fifth century.

CHAPTER V.

Mixed Character of the Population.—The British Church.—Truth and Fable.—Hengist and Horsa.—Hostile bands of Settlers.—Native seats of the Immigrants.—Gregory the Great.—Saxon Heathendom.—Arrival of Augustin.—Ethelbert.—Conference at Augustin's Oak.—Laws of Ethelbert.—Edwin and Paulinus.—Incessant Wars.—Cultivation of Letters.

"THEY" (the Romans), says Bede, "resided within the rampart that Severus made across the island, on the south side of it; as the cities, temples, bridges, and paved ways do testify to this day." On the north of the wall were the nations that no severity had reduced to subjection, and no resistance could restrain from plunder. At the extreme west of England were the people of Cornwall, or little Wales, as it was called; having the most intimate relations with the people of Britannia Secunda, or Wales; and both connected with the colony of Armorica. The inhabitants of Cornwall and Wales, we may assume, were almost exclusively of the old British stock. The abandonment of the country by the Romans had affected them far less than that change affected the more cultivated country, that had been the earliest subdued, and for nearly four centuries had received the Roman institutions and adopted the Roman customs. But in the chief portion of the island, from the southern and eastern coasts to the Tyne and the Solway, there was a mixed population, amongst whom it would be difficult to trace that common bond which would constitute nationality. The British families of the interior had become mingled with the settlers of Rome and its tributaries to whom grants of land had been assigned as the rewards of military service; and the coasts from the Humber to the Exe had been here and there peopled with northern settlers, who had gradually planted themselves amongst the Romanised British; and were, we may well believe, amongst the most active of those who carried forward the commercial intercourse of Britain with Gaul and Italy. When, therefore, we approach the period of what is termed the Saxon invasion, and hear of the decay, the feebleness, the cowardice, and the misery of the Britons—all which attributes have been somewhat too readily

bestowed upon the population which the Romans had left behind—it would be well to consider what these so-called Britons really were, to enable us properly to understand the transition state through which the country passed.

Our first native historian is Gildas, who lived in the middle of the sixth century. "From the early part of the fifth century, when the Greek and Roman writers cease to notice the affairs of Britain, his narrative, on whatever authority it may have been founded, has been adopted without question by Bede and succeeding authors, and accepted, notwithstanding its barrenness of facts and pompous obscurity, by all but general consent, as the basis of early English history."* Gibbon has justly pointed out his inconsistencies, his florid descriptions of the flourishing condition of agriculture and commerce after the departure of the Romans, and his denunciations of the luxury of the people; when he, at the same time, describes a race who were ignorant of the arts, incapable of building walls of defence, or of arming themselves with proper weapons. When "this monk," as Gibbon calls him, "who, in the profound ignorance of human life, presumes to exercise the office of historian," tells us that the Romans, who were occasionally called in to aid against the Picts and Scots, "give energetic council to the timorous natives, and leave them patterns by which to manufacture arms," we seem to be reading an account of some remote tribe, to whom the Roman sword and buckler were as unfamiliar as the musket was to the Otaheitans when Cook first went amongst them. When Gildas describes the soldiers on the wall as "equally slow to fight and ill-adapted to run away;" and tells the remarkable incident which forms part of every school-boy's belief, that the defenders of the wall were pulled down by great hooked weapons and dashed against the ground, we feel a pity akin to contempt for a people so stupid and passive, and are not altogether sorry that the Picts and Scots, "differing one from another in manners, but inspired with the same avidity for blood," had come with their bushy beards and their half-clothed bodies, to supplant so effeminate a race. When he makes this feeble people send an embassy to a Roman in Gaul to say, "The barbarians drive us to the sea; the sea throws us back on the barbarians: thus two modes of death await us; we are either slain or drowned," we must wonder at the very straitened limits in which this unhappy people were shut up. Surely much of this is little more than the tumid rhetoric of the

* Preface to Monumenta Historica Britannica, p. 60.

cloister; for all the assumptions that have been raised of the physical degeneracy of the people are quite unsupported by any real historical evidence. M. Guizot considers it unjust and cruel to view their humble supplications, so declared by Gildas, to Rome for aid, as evidences of the effeminacy of that nation, whose resistance to the Saxons has given a chapter to history at a time when history has few traces of Italians, Spaniards, and Gauls. That the representations of Gildas could only be partially true, as applied to some particular districts, is sufficiently proved by the undoubted fact, that within little more than twenty years from the date of these cowardly demonstrations, Anthemius, the emperor, solicited the aid of the Britons against the Visigoths; and twelve thousand men from this island, under one of the native chieftains, Rhiothimus, sailed up the Loire, and fought under the Roman command. They are described by a contemporary Roman writer as quick, well-armed; turbulent and contumacious, from their bravery, their numbers and their common agreement. These were not the people who were likely to have stood upon a wall to be pulled down by hooked weapons. They might have been the people who had clung, more than the other inhabitants of the Roman provinces, to their original language and customs; but it is not improbable that they would have been of the mixed races with whom Rome had been in more intimate relations, and to whom she continued to render offices of friendship after the separation of the island province from her empire.

Amidst all this conflict of testimony, there is the undoubted fact, that out of the Roman municipal institutions had risen the establishment of separate sovereignties, as Procopius relates. Britain, according to St. Jerome, was "a province fertile in tyrants." The Roman municipal government was kept compact and uniform under a great centralising power. It fell to pieces here, as in Gaul, when that power was withdrawn. It resolved itself into a number of local governments without any principle of cohesion. The vicar of the municipium became an independent ruler and head of a little republic; and that his authority was contested by some who had partaken of his delegated dignity, may be reasonably inferred. The difference of races would also promote the contests for command. If East Anglia contained a preponderance of one race of settlers, and Kent and Sussex of another, they might well quarrel for supremacy. But when all the settlers on the Saxon shore had lost the control and protection of the Count who once governed

them, it may also be imagined that the more exclusively British districts would not readily co-operate for defence with those who were more strange to their kindred even than the Roman. All the European continent was in a state of political dislocation; and we may safely conclude that when the great power was shattered that had so long held the government of the world, the more distant and subordinate branch of its empire would resolve itself into some of the separate elements of authority and of imperfect obedience, by which a clan is distinguished from a nation.

Nor was the power of the Christian Church in Britain of a more united character than that of the civil rulers. No doubt a Church had been formed and organised, as we have already noticed. There were Bishops, so called, in the several cities; but their authority was little concentrated and their tenets were discordant. Pilgrimages were even made to the sacred places of Palestine; and at a very early period monasteries were founded. That of Bangor, or the great circle, seems to have had some relation to the ancient druidical worship, upon which it was probably engrafted in that region where Druidism had long flourished. There were British versions of the Bible. But that the Church had no sustaining power at the period when civil society was so wholly disorganised, may be inferred from circumstances which preceded the complete overthrow of Christian rites by Saxon heathendom. Bede devotes several chapters of his "Ecclesiastical History" to the actions of St. Germanus, who came expressly to Britain to put down the Pelagian heresy; and, amidst the multitude of miraculous circumstances, records how "the authors of the perverse notions lay hid, and, like the evil spirits, grieved for the loss of the people that was rescued from them. At length, after mature deliberation, they had the boldness to enter the lists, and appeared, being conspicuous for riches, glittering in apparel, and supported by the flatteries of many." The people, according to Bede, were the judges of this great controversy; and gave their voices for the orthodox belief. Whether the Pelagians were expelled from Britain by reason or by force, it is evident that, in the middle of the fifth century, there was a strong element of religious disunion very generally prevailing; and that at a period when the congregations were in a great degree independent of each other, and therefore difficult of subjection to a common authority, the rich and the powerful had adopted a creed which was opposed to the centralising rule of the Romish Church, and were arguing about points of faith as strongly as they were

contesting for worldly supremacy. Dr. Lappenberg justly points out this celebrated controversy in our country, as "indicating the weakness of that religious connection which was so soon to be totally annihilated." We may, in some degree, account for the reception of the doctrine of Pelagius by knowing that he was a Briton, whose plain unlatinised name was Morgan.

Macaulay has startled many a reader of the most familiar Histories of England, in saying—"Hengist and Horsa, Vortigern and Rowena, Arthur and Mordred, are mythical persons, whose very existence may be questioned, and whose adventures must be classed with those of Hercules and Romulus." It is difficult to write of a period of which the same writer has said, "an age of fable completely separates two ages of truth." Yet no one knew better than this accomplished historian himself, that an age of fable and an age of truth cannot be distinguished with absolute precision. It is not that what is presented to us through the haze of tradition must necessarily be unreal, any more than that what comes to us in an age of literature must be absolutely true. An historical fact, a real personage, may be handed down from a remote age in the songs of bards; but it is not therefore to be inferred that these national lyrics are founded upon pure invention. It is curious to observe that, wandering amidst these traces of events and persons that have been shaped into history, how ready we are to walk in the footsteps of some half-fabulous records, and wholly to turn away from others which seem as strongly impressed upon the shifting sands of national existence. We derive Hengist and Horsa from the old Anglo-Saxon authorities; and modern history generally adopts them. Arthur and Mordred have a Celtic origin, and they are as generally rejected as "mythical persons." It appears to us that it is as precipitate wholly to renounce the one as the other, because they are both surrounded with an atmosphere of the fabulous. Hengist and Horsa come to us encompassed with Gothic traditions that belong to other nations. Arthur presents himself with his attributes of the magician Merlin, and the knights of the Round Table. But are we therefore to deny altogether their historical existence? In following the *ignis fatuus* of tradition, the credulous annalists of the monastic age were lost in the treacherous ground over which it led them. The more patient research of a critical age sees in that doubtful light a friendly warning of what to avoid, and hence a guide to more stable pathways.

Hengist and Horsa who, according to the Anglo-Saxon histo-

rians, landed in the year 449 on the shore which is called Ypwines-fleet, were personages of more than common mark. "They were the sons of Wihtgils; Wihtgils son of Witta, Witta of Wecta, Wecta of Woden." So says the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and adds, "From this Woden sprung all our royal families." These descendants, in the third generation, from the great Saxon divinity, came over in three boats. They came by invitation of Wyrtgeone—Vortigern—king of the Britons. The king gave them land in the south-east of the country, on condition that they should fight against the Picts; and they did fight, and had the victory wheresoever they came. And then they sent for the Angles, and told them of the worthlessness of the people and the excellences of the land. This is the Saxon narrative. The seductive graces of Rowena, the daughter of Horsa, who corrupted the king of the Britons by love and wine, is an embellishment of the British traditions. Then came the great battles for possession of the land. At Aylesford and Crayford the Kentish Britons were overthrown. Before the Angles, the Welch fled like fire. These events occupy a quarter of a century. While they are going on, the Roman emperor, as we have mentioned upon indubitable authority, receives an auxiliary force of twelve thousand men from Britain. We cannot rely upon narratives that tell us of *the* king of the Britons, when we learn from no suspicious sources that the land was governed by many separate chiefs; and which represent a petty band of fugitives as gaining mighty triumphs for a great ruler, and then subduing him themselves in a wonderfully short time. The pretensions of Hengist and Horsa to be the immediate descendants of Woden would seem to imply their mythical origin. But many Saxon chiefs of undoubted reality rested their pretensions upon a similar genealogy. The myth was as flattering to the Anglo-Saxon pride of descent, as the corresponding myth that the ancient inhabitants of the island were descended from the Trojan Brute was acceptable to the British race. But amidst much of fable there is the undoubted fact that Germanic tribes were gradually possessing themselves of the fairest parts of Britain—a progressive usurpation, far different from a sudden conquest. Amidst the wreck of the social institutions left by Rome, when all that remained of a governing power was centred in the towns, it may be readily conceived that the rich districts of the eastern and southern coasts would be eagerly peopled by new settlers, whose bond of society was founded upon the occupation of the land; and who, extending the area of their occupation, would eventually come into hostile conflict with the previous possessors.

For a century and a half a thick darkness seems to overspread the history of our country. In the Anglo-Saxon writers we can trace little, with any distinctness, beyond the brief and monotonous records of victories and slaughters. Hengist and Æsc slew four troops of Britons with the edge of the sword. Hengist then vanishes, and Ælla comes with his three sons. In 491 they besieged Andres-cester, "and slew all that dwelt therein, so that not a single Briton was there left." Then come Cerdic and Cynric his son; then Port and his two sons, and land at Portsmouth; and so we reach the sixth century. Cerdic and Cynric now stand foremost amongst the slaughterers, and they establish the kingdom of the West Saxons, and conquer the Isle of Wight. In the middle of the century Ida begins to reign, from whom arose the royal race of North-humbria. In 565 Ethelbert succeeded to the kingdom of the Kentish-men, and held it fifty-three years. The war goes on in the South-midland counties, where Cuthwulf is fighting; and it reaches the districts of the Severn, where Cuthwine and Ceawlin slay great kings, and take Gloucester, and Cirencester, and Bath. One of these fierce brethren is killed at last, and Ceawlin, "having taken many spoils and towns innumerable, wrathful returned to his own." Where "his own" was we are not informed. We reach, at length, the year 596, when "Pope Gregory sent Augustin to Britain, with a great many monks, who preached the word of God to the nation of the Angles." Bede very judiciously omits all such details. He tells us that "they carried on the conflagration from the eastern to the western sea, without any opposition, and almost covered all the superfices of the perishing island. Public as well as private structures were overturned; the priests were everywhere slain before the altars; the prelates and the people, without any respect of persons, were destroyed with fire and sword." There is little to add to these impressive words, which no doubt contain the general truth. But if we open the British history of Geoffrey of Monmouth, we find ourselves relieved from the thick darkness of the Anglo-Saxon records, by the blue lights and red lights of the most wondrous romance. Rowena comes with her golden wine-cup. Merlin instructs Vortigern how to discover the two sleeping dragons who hindered the foundation of his tower. Aurelius, the Christian king, burns Vortigern in his Cambrian city of refuge. Eldol fights a duel with Hengist, cuts off his head, and destroys the Saxons without mercy. Merlin the magician, and Uther Pendragon, with fifteen thousand men, bring over "the Giant's Dance" from Ireland, and set it up

in Salisbury Plain. Uther Pendragon is made the Christian king over all Britain. At length we arrive at Arthur, the son of Uther. To him the entire monarchy of Britain belonged by hereditary right. Hoel sends him fifteen thousand men from Armorica, and he makes the Saxons his tributaries; and with his own hand kills four hundred and seventy in one battle. He not only conquers the Saxons, but subdues Gaul, amongst other countries, and holds his court in Paris. His coronation at the City of the Legions (Caer-Leon) is gorgeous beyond all recorded magnificence; and the general state of the country, in these days of Arthur, before the middle of the sixth century, is thus described:—"At that time, Britain had arrived at such a pitch of grandeur, that in abundance of riches, luxury of ornaments, and politeness of inhabitants, it far surpassed all other kingdoms." Mordred, the wicked traitor, at length disturbs all this tranquillity and grandeur, and brings over barbarous people from different countries. Arthur falls in battle. The Saxons prevail; and the Britons retire into Cornwall and Wales.

Amidst the bewildering mass of the obscure and the fabulous which our history presents of the first century and a half of the Saxon colonisation, there are some well-established facts which are borne out by subsequent investigations. Such is Bede's account of the country of the invaders, and the parts in which they settled. This account, compared with other authorities, gives us the following results. They consisted of "the three most powerful nations of Germany,—Saxons, Angles, and Jutes." The Saxons came from the parts which, in Bede's time, were called the country of the Old Saxons. That country is now known as the Duchy of Holstein. These, under Ella, founded the kingdom of the South Saxons,—our present Sussex. Later in the fifth century, the same people, under Cerdic, established themselves in the district extending from Sussex to Devonshire and Cornwall, which was the kingdom of the West Saxons. Other Saxons settled in Essex and Middlesex. The Angles, says Bede, came from "the country called Angelland, and it is said from that time to remain desert to this day." There is a part of the Duchy of Sleswig, to the north of Holstein, which still bears the name of Angel or Angeln. These people gave their name to the whole country, Engla-land, or Angla-land, from the greater extent of territory which they permanently occupied. As the Saxons possessed themselves of the southern coasts, the Angles established themselves on the north-eastern. Their kingdom of East Anglia comprised Norfolk and Suffolk, as well as part of

Cambridgeshire; and they extended themselves to the north of the Humber, forming the powerful state of Northumbria, and carrying their dominion even to the Forth and the Clyde. The Jutes came from the country north of the Angles, which is in the upper part of the present Sleswig; and they occupied Kent and the Isle of Wight, with that part of Hampshire which is opposite the island. Sir Francis Palgrave is of opinion that "the tribes by whom Britain was invaded appear principally to have proceeded from the country now called Friesland; for of all the continental dialects the ancient Frisick is the one which approaches most nearly to the Anglo-Saxon of our ancestors." Mr. Craik has pointed out that "the modern kingdom of Denmark comprehends all the districts from which issued, according to the old accounts, the several tribes who invaded Britain upon the fall of the Roman empire. And the *Danes* proper (who may be considered to represent the Jutes); the *Angles*, who live between the Bight of Flensborg and the river Schley on the Baltic; the *Frisons*, who inhabit the islands along the west coast of Jutland, with a part of the bailiwick of Husum in Sleswig; and the *Germans* of Holstein (Bede's Old Saxons) are still all recognised by geographers and ethnographers as distinct races." *

Connected with the early name of the country is the well-known story of Gregory the Great. The scene of this story is papal Rome—the Rome which had lost her provinces, and was no longer the seat of empire; which dreaded the hostile approach of the Lombards; whose Campagna was a wilderness, and whose Tiber deluged the city which it once refreshed; whose citizens depended for their food upon the precarious supplies of Sicily and Egypt; and whose noble monuments were tottering to decay. In this miserable city dwelt the monk Gregory, who was destined to raise the condition of its inhabitants, and to relieve it from some of its sorrows and fears, when he should become its spiritual and temporal ruler. In the market-place of Rome were exposed to sale some youthful slaves—fair-skinned and comely, with the long hair which was regarded as a mark of good descent. They are Angles —Angli,—said the dealers in slaves, who had probably bought them from the southern tribes who had captured them in battle. "They have an angelic mien," said the monk, "and it becomes such to be coheirs with the angels in Heaven." They come from the province of Deira, said the merchants (Northumbria was divided into Deira

* Outlines of the History of the English Language, by George L. Craik. 2nd Ed. 1855.

and Bernicia). "It is well," said the priest; "*de ira eruti*, snatched from wrath, and called to the mercy of Christ." Lastly, he was told that the king of the province was Ella. "*Alle*luiah," said the good father; "the praise of God the Creator must be sung in those parts." Bede tells this singular history with evident admiration of the happy conceits of the great churchman. It is possible that they were the inventions of the cloister. But the fact that British slaves were an article of traffic is undoubted; and it is equally true that Gregory, however touched by the ambitious spirit of his church, was a man of truly Christian benevolence. "In the use of wealth," says one not ordinarily favourable to ecclesiastical power, "he acted like a faithful steward of the church and the poor, and liberally supplied to their wants the inexhaustible resources of abstinence and order. . . . . Such was the extreme sensibility of his conscience, that, for the death of a beggar who had perished in the streets, he interdicted himself during several days from the exercise of sacerdotal functions." * Such a man would perceive that there was a noble field for his pious exertions in the conversion of that Britain which had relapsed into heathendom. He was forbidden to undertake the mission himself; but he never neglected the duty which the fair-skinned slaves of the Roman market-place had presented to his imagination, and which he ultimately carried out in a spirit in which zeal was happily blended with prudence.

The heathendom which Gregory ardently desired to overthrow had taken a very deep root in the country before the arrival of the Christian missionaries. Woden was the Mercury of the Saxons. William of Malmesbury, speaking of the pretensions of Hengist and Horsa to be descended from him, says, "They were great-grandsons of the most ancient Woden, from whom almost all the royal families of these barbarous nations deduce their origin; and to whom the nations of the Angles, fondly deifying him, have consecrated the fourth day of the week, and the sixth day unto his wife Frea, by a sacrilege which lasts even unto this day." To him were human victims sacrificed. That his worship was universally spread in England is shown, according to Mr. Kemble, by the extreme frequency of names of places compounded with his name. Thus, the ancient fortification Wansdike, is Woden's dike. Thor, the thunderer, the god of storms and rains, wielding his terrible hammer, was the Saxon Jupiter, as Tiw was their Mars. Frea, according to Mr. Kemble, was a god; and Woden's wife was

* Gibbon, chap. xlv.

Fricge. There were lesser gods—Baldr, and Geat, and Sætere, or Saturn. Goddesses were numerous. Eastre survives in the great festival of the Church. Their mythology included Fiends, and Monsters, and Fates. "The weird sisters" of Macbeth comes from the Wyrd, who weave the web of destiny. There was hero-worship, too, in which the rude but imaginative man recognised some great attribute of courage or goodness, which he exalted into a power below his divinities, but calling for his habitual reverence. Perhaps we have been too much accustomed to look only at the revolting aspect of these superstitions; and not to see in them that, however debasing in some essentials, they were manifestations of a spirit which did not walk in the material world without believing in some presiding influences which governed human actions. In this rude mythology we see glimpses of a belief in a future life, and of a state of rewards and punishments. That the mythology of the nations who overran England in the fifth and sixth centuries, and swept away whatever remained of Roman rites, with all that had been created of Christian worship, was a great dominant principle in the life of the people, admits of little question. But, at the same time, it possessed some capacity of assimilation with that faith before which the classical paganism of the ancient world had retreated. Mr. Kemble points out the pregnant fact in the history of our Anglo-Saxon progenitors, at the commencement of the sixth century, "that Christianity met but little resistance among them, and enjoyed an easy triumph, or, at the worst, a careless acquiescence, even among those whose pagan sympathies could not be totally overcome." *

"This year," A.D. 597, says the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, "Augustin and his companions came to the land of the Angles." The earnest wish of Gregory had at length been carried out. At the first command of his spiritual superior, Augustin and his companions set forward. But the difficulties of the journey, the dread of a hostile reception from a fierce people, and the ignorance of the language of those whom they would seek to teach and to convert, not unnaturally restrained their ardour. The zealous Pope would accept no excuse for desisting from a good work; but he smoothed the way of the missionaries through France, by recommending them to regal and priestly affection and comfort. They landed in the Isle of Thanet, in number about forty. "At that time," says Bede, "Ethelbert was the powerful King of Kent, who had ex-

* The Saxons in England, vol. i. p. 443.

tended his dominions as far as the great river Humber, by which the southern Saxons are divided from the northern." In the first Ethelbert we recognise the existence of some powerful authority which appears to belong to the title of king. Numerous chieftains, whose continual wars with the British inhabitants and amongst themselves have no historical interest, had passed away, and a gradual consolidation of territory and rule had taken place throughout the island. In the Kentish kingdom were now included those of Essex and Sussex, as a confederation acknowledging the supremacy of Ethelbert. The kingdom of the West Saxons was another powerful confederation, which ultimately became the acknowledged seat of the sovereignty of England. East Anglia had its defined boundaries in the extreme east of the island. Mercia claimed much of the remainder of England east of the Severn and south of the Humber; but at the time of Ethelbert, successful policy and warfare had subjected its petty sovereigns to the authority of the Kentish king. Northumbria, uniting the two kingdoms of Deira and Bernicia, extended beyond the Humber to the Border-land. There, in the north, were the Picts and Scots. In the farther west of England, and throughout Wales, were large portions of the unsubdued British race. We thus see how far the people of this country, at the beginning of the seventh century, were essentially different from the condition of one nation, united by common laws, possessing equal progress in industry and accumulated wealth, and having any great bond for defence or social improvement. In the kingdoms we have enumerated there were many sovereignties, of which the heads claimed royal descent and consequent superiority. The royal pedigree always went up to Woden, and often into a remoter antiquity. No doubt the rival claims to descent from kings and deities were the cause of perpetual wars, and stimulated the hostilities of tribe against tribe. The belief that in these kingdoms of the Germanic races there was any community of civil or warlike operation, is one of those hasty theories which modern research has effectually dispelled. The historian Rapin says of our Anglo-Saxon ancestors, "They formed their Witena gemot, or assembly of wise men, to settle the common affairs of the seven kingdoms, and conferred the command of their armies upon one chosen out of the seven kings, to whom, for that reason no doubt, some have given the title of Monarch." In later histories, upon which greater research has been bestowed as regards our early period, this "Monarch" is called a "Bretwalda." Without entering upon the controversial matters that arise out of the belief or non-belief in this real or unsubstantial dignity, we are disposed to give credit to the argument of Mr. Kemble, however strongly put, that, up to the period of which we are speaking, and indeed much later, "there is not the slightest evidence of a king exercising a central authority; and very little, at any time, of a combined action among the Saxons; and that it is quite as improbable that any Saxon king should ever have had a federal army to command, as it is certainly false that there ever was a general Witena gemot for him to preside over."*

To Ethelbert, then, the king of one of the most fertile portions of England, came the missionaries of Pope Gregory. They had taken with them "interpreters of the nation of the Franks." The king had married Berhta, the daughter of Charibert, king of the Franks, who, by the terms of her marriage contract, enjoyed the exercise of Christian worship, in the church of Saint Martin at Canterbury, which had subsisted from the Roman times of Christianity in Britain. There was, no doubt, commercial intercourse between France and England about that period; for the Anglo-Saxons who traded to Rouen are recognised as frequenting the great fair of St. Denis.† With these interpreters, then, Augustin had an interview with the Kentish king. He received the missionaries in the open air; "for he had taken precaution that they should not come to him in any house, according to the ancient superstition, lest, if they had any magical arts, they might at their coming impose upon him, and get the better of him."‡ He probably received them in one of the sacred boundaries over which Woden presided. They came, bearing a silver cross and a painted image, singing the Litany and offering up prayers. The king was not enthusiastic, but he was tolerant. He declined to forsake what he had so long followed with his people; but he allowed the missionaries publicly to teach their religion, and gave them a dwelling-place in his metropolis of Canterbury. In due time Ethelbert became himself a convert.

In the history of Bede there is given a remarkable correspondence between Gregory and Augustin in answer to many questions of the missionary. The politic Pope appears, in one of his letters, to have held no bigoted view of the customs in which one church differed from another, as the Roman and Gallican differed, but

* The Saxons in England, book ii. chap. i. † Lappenberg, vol. i. p. 131.
‡ Bede, book i. chap. xxvi.