desired Augustin to impress upon the new converts those great principles upon which Christianity rested. "Choose from the several churches whatever is pious, and religious, and right, and these, gathered as it were into one whole, instil as observances into the minds of the Angles." * And yet Augustin, in a conference with some of the ecclesiastics of the original British church, demanded so authoritatively, in his episcopal character, that they should conform to the Roman time of celebrating Easter, and to the Roman manner of baptism, that they refused to acknowledge him as their archbishop. Bede tells this story with characteristic ingenuousness. He records that Augustin performed a miracle which greatly moved the British priests to listen to him; but that one offence against the spirit of the Gospel made them reject his authority. After a first conference, at which the British ecclesiastics desired to consult their people before they departed from their ancient customs, they repaired to seek the advice of a certain holy and discreet hermit. He told them, "If the man is of God, follow him." "How," said they, "are we to know that?" He answered,—"Our Lord saith, Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart. If, therefore, Augustin is meek and lowly of heart, it is to be believed that he has taken upon himself the yoke of Christ, and offers it to you to take upon yourselves. But if he is haughty and proud, it is manifest that he is not of God, and that we need not regard his words." Again, they said, "How shall we discern this?" The anchorite replied, "Arrange it so that he first arrive with his company at the place of conference; and if, at your approach, he shall rise up to meet you, do you, being then assured that he is the servant of Christ, hear him obediently. But if he shall despise you, and not rise up to you, who are the greater in number, let him also be contemned of you." They came to the place of conference, where Augustin was seated, and Augustin did not rise. They applied the test. There was no union between the Anglo-Saxon and the British church; and Augustin threatened that if they would not accept peace with their brothers, they should have war with their enemies. Dr. Lingard sneeringly calls the advice of the anchorite a "sapient admonition, which left to accident the decision of the controversy." † It was a controversy about points of discipline only, according to the same authority. The ministers of the ancient British church, who had maintained the Christian doctrine amidst the changes and

Bede, book i. chap. xxvii.

† Lingard, chap. ii.

terrors of three centuries, refused to admit the authority in formulas of one who did not exhibit in his outward bearing the principle upon which every ordinance should rest. The vengeance with which they were threatened finally came upon them in the massacre of Bangor. On that terrible day, when Ethelfrith, the Bernician, advanced against the Britons, the monks of Bangor, who had fled to the army headed by the chief of Powis, knelt upon the battle-field, and prayed for the safety of their countrymen. The Pagan Saxon ordered the unarmed band to be massacred, "for if they are crying to God for my enemies, then they fight against me, though without arms." Taliesin, the British bard, was present at the great conflict:

> "I saw the oppression of the tumult; the wrath and tribulation;
> The blades gleaming on the bright helmet." *

The memory of Augustin has been stained by the reproach that he excited this massacre in a spirit of revenge against those who, in the language of Bede, "had disdained his counsels for their eternal salvation." The fierce prophecy of Augustin, even without his direct intervention, might have had much to do with its cruel accomplishment. Bede says, that the great Roman missionary was dead at the time of this event. Some affirm that this passage in Bede is an interpolation. Be that as it may, the spirit of the prophecy was anti-Christian; and Wordsworth justly says, in a note to his Sonnet, "The Monastery of Old Bangor," that Bede's account "suggests a most striking warning against national and religious prejudices."

Before the death of Ethelbert, in 616, he promulgated a code of laws, according to the counsel of wise men. "For this improvement," we are told, "he was indebted to the suggestions of the missionaries." † Bede, who is the authority in this particular, tells us nothing of the sort. He indeed says, that Ethelbert, "in the first place, set down what satisfaction he should make who stole any thing belonging to the Church, or the bishops, or the other clergy, resolving to give protection to those whose doctrine he had embraced." ‡ The laws of Ethelbert were a collection of the ordinances in practical application amongst the Saxon people for the administration of justice; and they continued in force, with variations that very slightly affected their principle, for several centu-

* Turner, Anglo-Saxons, vol. i. book iii. chap. v.

† Lingard, chap. ii.

‡ Bede, book ii. chap. v.

ries. They were the Common Law of the Germanic tribes, reduced in Ethelbert's kingdom to a statutory form, at the beginning of the seventh century. They were founded upon the principle of pecuniary compensation for every offence against person and property. Out of these brief "dooms," as they are called, we may collect a faithful picture, as far as it goes, of the state of society.* In the first article for the protection of the Church, we find recited the several degrees of bishop, priest, deacon, clerk. It was not held that damages, to use a familiar word of explanation, were to be paid without respect of persons, but that a bishop was to be compensated elevenfold, and a clerk threefold of the value of any stolen property. The amends, atonement, or indemnification, was called "bōt." The king's bōt was always the largest, except in the case of the bishop, who had twofold higher compensation for theft even than the king. If a man slew another in the king's "tun" (dwelling, with lands appertaining), he was to pay fifty shillings; if in that of an "eorl" (jarl, noble), twelve shillings. The slayer of the "hlafæta" (loaf-eater, domestic) of a "ceorl" (churl, freeman not noble), was to atone by six shillings. The mutilation of an "esne" (slave), was to be compensated to the owner at the full worth of the slave. The penalties for personal injuries to freemen are amongst the most curious of these dooms. It was not "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," but the eye had a pecuniary value, and so had the tooth. The evil consequence of the infliction, and not the motive of the offender, regulated the amount of the amends. Thus, if an ear was struck off, the bōt was twelve shillings; but "if the other ear hear not, let bōt be made with twenty-five shillings." In all cases of default of payment the remedy was prompt and effective. The offender became a penal slave. This principle of compensation, even for the highest class of offences, is no doubt indicative of a rude state of society. But it could not have subsisted so long without an adaptation, however incomplete, to the condition of the great body of the community. The law of the state fixed a value upon every man's life, according to his degree; which price, in the event of his being slain, was to be paid to his relatives. In the same way, it fixed a tariff upon all personal injuries that did not destroy life, and upon the outrages upon a man's domestic honour. It was the principle which interposed to avert, in some practical form, the terrible evils of private feud. Tacitus, writing of the

* The most ancient MS. of these Dooms is of the 12th century, and they are published in "The Ancient Laws and Institutes of England," issued by the Record Commission.

German nations, distinctly shows us whence these Anglo-Saxon laws were derived, and upon what reason they were founded. "The enmities, as well as the friendships, of father and kindred, they were bound to take up. Nor do their enmities remain implacable; for compensation is made even for homicide by a fixed number of sheep and cattle, and so the whole house is satisfied. Useful is this for the state, for feuds are the most dangerous where there is freedom."* It was the personal liberty of the Saxon man, and the holding together for mutual defence or revenge of the Saxon family, that rendered necessary this rude law of compensation. The Christian missionaries would have vainly laboured to introduce the Roman law amongst a people with whom the assertion of individual right was stronger than any bond of subjection to the state. But when we speak of personal liberty and family alliance, we speak only of what regards a small portion of the community. The greater number were unfree. They were serfs. Whatever compensation the law gave to the owner of a slave for his murder or mutilation by another, the owner was himself privileged to murder or mutilate him without accountability to any earthly tribunal. The only restraint was that he thus destroyed his own property. When the serf was past service, the master would be at liberty to destroy him, as even civilised Rome slew the useless slave. Pecuniary compensation for any offence the serf might commit was out of the question. He had no property, and he paid by yielding his body to the lash. There was no limitation to the amount of labour exacted from him. He might come into the servile condition as a captive in war, as an offender who had no power of compensation, or as a slave by birth. Manumission was rare; for if the slave were admitted to the privileges of civil society, it was necessary for his owner to provide him with land upon which to settle. His skill as a labourer gave him no title to freedom, nor afforded him the possibility of maintaining himself in a state of independence, unless he held land. The agricultural services, whether of male or female, were almost wholly discharged by serfs. The ploughman was the highest labourer on the soil; the smith the most esteemed handicraftsman. They might have small advantages over other serfs; but each was nevertheless a chattel of his lord. There were poor freemen, no doubt, who held land upon the consideration of a labour-rent; but far the greater number of all labourers were serfs. Their mere physical wants were prob-

* Germ. xxii.

ably not ill-supplied; and one of the blessings that Christianity brought to the land was, that the Church constantly strove to mitigate the hard lot of the unfree, and out of that portion of its possession, which was set apart for the poor, did often maintain the old and worn-out slave, when his master cast him off by an act of emancipation. The authority of the Church procured, moreover, the great body of toil-worn slaves a day of rest in every week—it gave them the Christian Sunday. But these healing influences were naturally slow and uncertain in producing a general amelioration of the labourer's lot; and thus, whatever might be the value of Saxon institutions to the free, we must pass on through centuries of serfdom before we can truly find a People.

The history of the establishment of Christianity in the seventh century is, to a great extent, the only portion of our history before Alfred which has an abiding human interest. What is generally called the history of the Heptarchy, or the Octarchy, is a dull chronicle of fierce hostilities and treacherous alliances, which affect us little more than the wars and truces of Choctaws and Cherokees. But when we come to the story of the conversion of king Edwin by Paulinus, we are once again in the society of men, and not of fighting savages. Edwin is king of Northumbria. His youth has been one of exile and suffering. He has regained his kingdom, and has married the Christian daughter of Ethelbert of Kent. Paulinus, an ordained bishop, had come with the young Princess Ethelburga to Edwin's country, and had sought in vain to convert the king. An assassin, sent by the king of the West Saxons, attempted the life of Edwin; but the king was saved by the fidelity of one of his nobles, who interposed his own body to avert the death-stroke from his lord. At the same hour Ethelburga bore a daughter. The young king vowed, that if he could obtain a victory over him who had sent the assassin, he would renounce his idols. The victory was gained. The king, proceeding with caution, summoned his council, after he had long pondered the instructions of Paulinus; and he received from the bishop a sign, that a promise made to him, in the days of his adversity, in a miraculous vision, had been accomplished in his restoration to power, and was now to be acknowledged by his spiritual obedience. Bede tells us the entire story with his usual charming simplicity, when he deals with a romantic subject. At the council of the king, the chief priest of Heathendom, by name Coifi, gave a very satisfactory reason for believing that the old religion had no virtue in it: "For not one of your people has applied himself more diligently to the worship of

our gods than I have; and yet there are many who have received from you greater benefits and greater honours, and are more prosperous in all their undertakings; whereas, if the gods were good for any thing, they would rather forward me, who have been so zealous to serve them." Is this Saxon notion of measuring the divine approbation by the amount of worldly advantage quite extinct among us? This is the prose of the narrative. Now we come to the poetry. An old eorl stood up and said:—"The life of man, O king, seems to me, in comparison with that which is hidden from us, to be like the sparrow, who, in the winter-time, as you sit in your hall with your thanes and attendants, warmed with the fire that is lighted in the midst, rapidly flies through, to seek shelter from the chilling storms of rain and snow without. As he flies through, entering by one door and passing out by another, he has a brief escape from the storm, and enjoys a momentary calm. Again he goes forth to another winter and vanishes from your sight. So also seems the short life of man. Of what went before it, or of what is to follow, we know not. If, therefore, this new doctrine brings us something more certain, in my mind it is worthy of adoption." Then Paulinus discoursed of God and the true worship with Edwin and Coifi, and the king and the priest were converted. The idols were to be smitten, and the sacred places profaned; but who, said the king, will accomplish that work? Coifi answered, "I. For who is fitter to destroy, through the wisdom given unto me from God, those things that I have worshipped in my ignorance?" Then Coifi mounted a horse, and took a lance, in defiance of the ordinance that forbade a sacrificing priest to ride, except upon a mare, or to bear arms; and he hurled his lance against the idol, and the temple was set on fire.*

The century which saw the establishment of Christianity amongst the Anglo-Saxons, and the succeeding century, was a period of incessant wars. The Pagan princes were sometimes in the ascendant; sometimes the converted. Sometimes princes who had listened to the Christian teachers and had been baptised, relapsed into Paganism; sometimes they enthusiastically threw away their power, and became monks. Oswald, the Northumbrian, kneels before the cross in the neighbourhood of Hexham, and defeats the British Cædwalla. Penda, the fierce king of Mercia, slays Oswald on the field of Maserfelth. Then Oswin overthrows Penda, the last and most powerful upholder of Saxon heathendom, who assailed every neighbouring state with remorseless cruelty. Then

* Bede, book ii. chap. xiv.

Wulfere, the son of Penda, regains the dominion of Mercia, and is conquered of Wessex. Ethelbald succeeds to his power, but yields to the West Saxons, upon whom he had partly imposed his yoke. Offa, who has written his name upon the great dyke reaching from the neighbourhood of Chester to the Wye, subjugates the ancient Britons, and ravages their territory; whilst the whole of the Anglo-Saxon states submit to his empire. Amidst these changes of fortune,—dire reverses, and horrible triumphs,—which were only partially brought to an end when Egbert of Wessex attained something like a supremacy at the beginning of the ninth century, and England had taken a place amongst the Christian communities of Europe,—it is consoling to turn from the outrages of barbarous chieftains to the contemplation of the learned and the pious, in their peaceful cells, keeping alive that flame of knowledge which without them might have been extinguished for ages. Out of his cloisters at Iona the light of piety and learning is first shed by Columba over the darkness of the northern Picts. Wilfred, the Bishop of York, builds churches in his diocese; and also teaches industrial arts to the South Saxons. Benedict Biscop, the Abbot of Wearmouth, fills his monastery with books and pictures which he brought from Rome. Cædmon, the cowherd, sings The Creation, and the Fall, in strains which have obtained for him the name of the Saxon Milton. Adhelm, whose Anglo-Latin poetry manifests his accomplishments,—a minstrel as well as a poet,—stands upon the bridge of Malmesbury, and as the peasants pass to and fro, gathers a crowd to listen to some of the popular songs to the accompaniment of his harp, and gradually weaves into the verses holy words of exhortation. Bede, a monk of undoubted genius and vast learning, sits in his cell at Jarrow, and amidst other worthy monuments of his piety and knowledge, gathers the obscure history of his country out of doubtful annals and imperfect traditions, weaving them into a narrative which we feel to be a conscientious one, however intermixed with stories which we, somewhat presumptuously, term superstitious. These men, and many illustrious fellow-labourers, struggled through the days of heathendom, and scarcely saw the full establishment of Christianity in this land. But the influences of what they taught gradually wrought that change which made the English one nation, under one creed. In the meantime knowledge is leading on to general civilisation. "The darkness begins to break; and the country which had been lost to view as Britain re-appears as England." *

* Macaulay.

CHAPTER VI.

Egbert at the Court of Charlemagne.—Alcuin.—Egbert, King of Wessex.—Reduces the other provinces to his supremacy.—The Northmen, or Danes.—Their ravages in England and France.—Ethelwulf.—Birth of Alfred.—His early years.—His sojourn at Rome.—Ethelbald.—Ethelbert.—Alfred's residence with Ethelbert.—Social ranks.—Rural Industry.

It is the last year of the eighth century. There is an English exile at the Court of Charlemagne, who, for thirteen years, has been a humble follower of the fortunes of the great king of the Franks. Egbert, the son of Alckmund, king of Kent, aspired to the crown of the West Saxons; but Beortric was preferred. Each claimed to be descended from Cerdic. Egbert fled to Offa, king of Mercia; but when Offa gave his daughter Edburga in marriage to Beortric there was no longer safety for him with a king to whom treachery and assassination were familiar instruments of his will. Charlemagne was one of those remarkable men whose influence M. Guizot has justly described: "Why a great man comes at a particular epoch, and what force of his own he puts into the development of the world, no one can say. This is the secret of Providence; but nevertheless the fact is certain." * Such a man does sometimes come to put an end to anarchy and social stagnation—a terrible and often a tyrannical power. Such a man was Charlemagne. He drove back the barbarian forces that were pressing forward against the establishment of European civilisation, by his power as a conqueror. He reduced the scattered elements of authority and justice into a system, by his skill as an administrator. He gave the grape of the South to the shores of the Rhine, and otherwise extended the domain of fertility, as a physical improver. He raised up the real civilising power of knowledge to render his triumphs of war and peace of permanent utility, by his zeal as a patriot and his sympathy as a student. In this school was Egbert, the Kentish exile, educated. As he marched with the armies of the great king against the Lombards and the Bavarians, the Huns and the Saxons, he saw war upon as grand a scale as the world had

* Civilisation en Europe. Troisième Leçon.