Canute and his courtiers. The king plants his chair on the sands, commanding the waves to retire, but the waters will not obey; and Canute moralizes upon the vanity of earthly rule, compared with that of the Power who alone could say to the sea, "Thus far shalt thou go, and no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

The impression of his character which Canute has left upon the English mind is not that of the barbarous conqueror. We cannot say of him, as one of our great masters of English said of Alfred, "He left learning where he found ignorance; justice, where he found oppression; peace, where he found distraction." * But he came, with a powerful will, to make a foreign domination endurable by a show of impartiality and to substitute the strength of despotism for the feebleness of anarchy. When he ceased to be an enemy of England he became a real friend. His power was too strong to be disputed; and he therefore wielded it with moderation, after the contest for supremacy was fairly over. He, the emperor of the Anglo-Saxons, as he chose to be called, was also king of Swedes, and Danes, and Norwegians. He was an unmitigated despot in his own half-Christian lands; but he adapted his English rule to the higher civilisation of his most important kingdom. In 1030 he made a pilgrimage to Rome, with his staff and wallet; and amidst the passes of the Alps, or beside the ruins of the Cæsars, he thought humbly of his past life, and made new resolves for his future career. His letter to "all the nations of the English," which he sent from Denmark after his return from Rome, has one passage which may make us believe that power and prosperity are not always corrupting: "And now, be it known to you all, that I have dedicated my life to God, to govern my kingdoms with justice, and to observe the right in all things. If, in the time that is past, and in the violence and carelessness of youth, I have violated justice, it is my intention, by the help of God, to make full compensation. Therefore I beg and command those unto whom I have entrusted the government, as they wish to preserve my good will, and save their own souls, to do no injustice either to poor or rich. Let those who are noble, and those who are not, equally obtain their rights, according to the laws, from which no deviation shall be allowed, either from fear of me, or through favor to the powerful, or for the purpose of supplying my treasury. I want no money raised by injustice." Canute died in 1035.

* Fuller, Worthies, vol. i. p. 64.

CHAPTER XII.

Saxon and Danish races.—Harold and Hardicanute.—Murder of Alfred.—Death of Hardicanute.—Election of Edward the Confessor.—Earl Godwin.—Influence of the Normans.—Banishment of Godwin and his sons.—Triumph of the Norman party.

CANUTE, who died at Shaftesbury, was buried at Winchester. The Danish conqueror found his last resting-place amidst the old Saxon kings. A northern antiquary draws the following inferences from the contemplation of the chest in the choir of the present cathedral, in which the bones are collected, according to an inscription, of Kings Canute and Rufus, of Queen Emma, and of two archbishops: "An immense change had taken place with regard to the Danes in England, since their first appearance there as barbarous heathen vikings. Instead of their kings seeking renown by the destruction of churches and convents, and by murdering or maltreating the clergy; instead of their despising any other kind of burial than that in the open fields, or hills under large caverns or monumental stones; their successors were now regarded as the benefactors and protectors of the Church, and, as such, worthy to repose in the most important ecclesiastical edifices,—even in the principal district of their former mortal enemies." * Canute, he adds, "had happily broken through the strong barrier which had hitherto separated Saxon south England from Danish north England." From this period, indeed, it would be useless to attempt to draw distinctions between the Saxon and Danish races. The ingenious author we have quoted, with a laudable patriotism, endeavours to show that many of the names and customs which we ordinarily call Saxon are Danish. He has probably carried his theory much too far, by looking at such matters "from the Danish point of view." † In regard to language, we may well believe that the dialect of the later settlers of Northumbria and East Anglia became blended with that of the earlier settlers of Wessex and Mercia. In the same way the several races became gradually intermixed. Thomas

* "The Danes in England," by J. J. A. Worsaae, p. 29.
† See an able article in "Gentleman's Magazine," March, 1852.

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Fuller says of the Saxons, that their "offspring at this day are the main bulk and body of the English (though not gentry) nation;" and of the Danes, that "living here rather as inroaders than inhabitants, is the cause that so few families (distinguishable by their surnames) are descended from them, extant in our age."* This good old writer may also have carried his theory a little too far. Whether the Johnsons, Jacksons, Thomsons, Stevensons, are descended from Danes or otherwise, there is no doubt that "the ending, *son* or *sen* (a son), is quite peculiar to Scandinavia." We may also accept the statement of a striking fact, "which will not escape the attention of at least any observant Scandinavian traveller, that the inhabitants of the north of England bear, on the whole, more than those of any other part of that country, an unmistakeable personal resemblance to the Danes and Norwegians."† Still, the conclusion is tolerably clear that "the main bulk and body of the English nation" is Saxon. Compared with south and mid-England, the north was very scantily peopled until it became the great seat of manufacturing industry; and in the period before the Norman Conquest, and long after, it is manifest that a district of fertile lowland, whose plains are watered by gentle rivers, would support a far greater agricultural population, than a district where the valleys are narrow and the mountains sterile. From this period, therefore, when the contest of two centuries between Saxon and Dane came to an end, we shall consider the Danish population as a part of the great Anglo-Saxon family; with whom they had at last become identical, in the possession of a common country and a common religion.

Canute had two sons previous to his marriage with Emma of Normandy. They were illegitimate. The one was Sweyn; the other Harold, called the Harefoot. His legitimate son by Emma was Hardicanute. At the time of Canute's death, the two sons of Ethelred, also the children of Emma, were living in Normandy. The two sons of Edmund Ironside were in Hungary. Of these possible claimants to the crown of England, Harold was the only one in the country. Sweyn had the kingdom of Norway assigned to him in his father's lifetime; Hardicanute was in Denmark. The great nobles were divided as to the choice of a successor to the Danish king; but at a witena-gemot held at Oxford, it was decided that Mercia and Northumbria should be assigned to Harold; whilst Wessex should be held by Emma, as regent for

* "Worthies," chap. xxiv. † "Danes in England," p. 80.

her son Hardicanute, who remained in his Scandinavian kingdom. There was a strong party in Wessex, who would have preferred the sons of their old Saxon king Ethelred. Edward, in consequence, came over with Norman soldiers. But these new followers of an English prince were hateful to the people; and Edward very soon gave up an enterprise which involved so much of personal risk. A similar attempt of his brother Alfred had a tragic ending. With a few adherents he landed in Kent, and proceeded to Canterbury, where the people gladly received him. Ethelnoth, the archbishop, welcomed the exile; for Harold, who had claimed to be supreme king over all England, was living an infamous life, and the archbishop had refused to consecrate him. The unfortunate Alfred was the victim of an abominable plot; and was seduced into the rash step of placing himself in the power of an unscrupulous tyrant. A letter had been written in the name of his mother, urging her son to make an attempt to obtain the kingdom. When Alfred had advanced into the country, Earl Godwin, who had supported the claims of Hardicanute, received him with open arms, and conducted him to Guildford. In the night, the weary adventurers were seized and manacled. There are various narratives of their subsequent fate. Some write that the greater number were massacred; and that Alfred was blinded, and finally put to death at Ely. "No bloodier deed had been done in this land since the Danes came," as one chronicler writes. The mother of Alfred fled to Bruges; and Harold was proclaimed king of all England.

The illegitimate son of Canute—the son of a shoemaker, as the scandal of those times assumes—did not long retain his ill-gotten power. He died in 1039. Hardicanute was now invited to take possession of the vacant throne. His election equally satisfied the Saxons and the Danes. A deputation was sent to Bruges to conduct him and his mother to the kingdom; and the ships which Hardicanute had intended for a hostile descent bore him to the Thames for a peaceful coronation. Setting an example of that paltry vengeance which, in what we call civilised times, disgraced the Restoration of the Stuarts, he caused the body of Harold to be disinterred; to be decapitated; and to be cast into the Thames. There were some proscriptions; and there was extravagant taxation, which drove the people of Exeter to revolt. But the country soon settled into tranquillity under this brief rule. Hardicanute sent for his half-brother Edward, and treated him with a kindness which shows some generosity of nature. He was probably not of a vin-

dictive or suspicious temper; but had some of the negative merits that not unfrequently are associated with the character of the indolent voluptuary. He was propitiated by the splendid presents of the powerful Godwin; and suffered his mother and the great earl to rule the kingdom, whilst he abandoned himself to his feasts and carousals. He was surrounded by Danish flatterers and boon-companions. His followers were insolent to the Saxon race; but their sociality was more injurious than their insults. The Saxons were addicted to intemperance; yet the examples of Hardicanute and his courtiers plunged them still deeper into sensuality. Hardicanute, the last of the Danish kings, soon made an end of his feasts and dominion. At a great marriage-banquet at the house of Clapa, one of his thanes (from which house we are held to derive the name of our suburban Clapham), the king stood up at a late hour of the night to pledge the company, and dropping speechless, was carried to his death-bed, after having reigned a little less than two years.

At the death of Hardicanute, in 1042, the English people, however composed of Angles, Saxons, and Danes, had been under direct foreign domination for a quarter of a century. Under the weak government of Ethelred, for thirty-seven years, the Saxons had sustained an unequal conflict with their plundering and tribute-exacting enemy. All the glories of the race of Cerdic had vanished. The kingdom had passed through a long period of intestine conflicts and of exhausting wars. But there was still a people. There was a people, with the memories of Alfred, and the first Edward, and Athelstan, still preserved in their national songs and traditions. The last of the oppressing race was gone. The lineal descendant of the Saxon race was amongst them. Edward, the son of Ethelred, had been brought up an exile with the relations of his mother. He had no vigour of character; he had received the education of a monk rather than that of the descendant of a long line of kings; he was familiar with other customs, and with another language, than that belonging to his race. In his mind the great idea of nationality had but little place. But he was the one left, in whom the Saxons could cherish those sacred feelings of a legitimate descent which gave to the king the attribute of blood—that attribute which, in the eyes of the people, was more important than the talent and courage of any claimant to dominion who was not of the stock of those sons of Woden, who, five hundred years before, had led the blue-eyed myriads to conquest. There was a man in England, of eminent ability, of almost supreme power, who had that intense feeling of nationality which would make the Saxon race again predominant, and in that predominance would absorb all the minor differences which separated the Danish settlers from the Saxon. That man was Earl Godwin. He saw, which was not difficult to discover, that on the opposite shores there had grown up a nation that would be a more formidable enemy to England than any of the Scandinavian people. He knew that the conquest of England had long been the secret aspiration of the Norman. The descendants of Rollo, planted in a rich soil; cultivating arts in which England was inferior; possessing a more refined luxury; of indomitable courage amidst their refinements; dreaded by the Frankish kings whose sovereignty they despised; the conquerors of Sicily; the heirs of the courage and the ambition of the old sea-kings:—these were the men whom England had now to dread. Was Godwin powerful enough to be the leader of his country? The time was not come. He put Edward upon the throne; and he gave to him his own daughter in marriage.

Godwin is the prominent man in the reign of Edward the Confessor. His participation in the murder of Edward's brother was "the cry of the Normans," as Thierry emphatically puts it. He was the antagonist of the Normans; and we may readily believe that their historians loaded his memory with unmerited obloquy. Before a great assembly of the witan, in the time of Hardicanute, he swore, according to the Saxon laws—and his oath was, according to the same laws, supported by kinsmen, friends, or witnesses—that he had taken no part in the death of Alfred. At the accession of Edward he held the greatest earldom of the south, including Sussex, Kent, and part of Wessex. His sons, Harold and Sweyn, were, with their father, the lords of all the land from the Humber to the Severn. They had the command of half England, and of the richest half. There were other brothers of this powerful family—Wulnoth, Tostig, Gurth, and Leofwine—who were subsequently advanced to high dignities. Edith, the daughter of Godwin, who became queen, exhibits, in the quiet charms of her character, a proof that in the family of the ambitious earl she had received a gentle nurture. Ingulphus, the monk of Croyland, says of her, in a Latin hexameter, "As the thorn is the parent of the rose, so is Godwin of Editha;" and he adds, "I have seen her many times in my childhood, when I went to visit my father, who was dwelling in the king's palace. Oftentimes, when I was return-

ing from school, would she question me in my grammar, or my verses, or my logic, in which she was skilful; and when, after much subtle argument, she had concluded, she would, by her handmaiden, give me some pieces of money, and send me for refreshment to the buttery." This rose never saw another rose bloom from her tree. Her husband, with the superstition of the cloister, first neglected her. Then came a time when he persecuted her. She was forced upon the king—a mature man of forty—say some of the chroniclers, and they put these words into Godwin's mouth, "Swear to me that you will take my daughter for your wife, and I will give you the kingdom of England." According to others, Edward was as unwilling to receive the kingdom as to be encumbered with a wife. Malmesbury says, that, upon the death of Hardicanute, Edward was in great perplexity; that having desired a conference with Godwin, he threw himself at his feet, imploring him to facilitate his return to Normandy; and that to him Godwin answered, that the kingdom was Edward's right; that he was disciplined by difficulties in exile; from his former poverty would feel for the miseries of his people; and that if he would rely upon him, his throne would be secure. The chroniclers represent this as politic ambition postponing its own designs. It appears to us very like honest patriotism. Malmesbury adds of Godwin, "He was a man of ready wit, and spoke fluently in the vernacular tongue; powerful in bringing over the people to whatever he desired." Of Edward we may truly say, he was a man of slow understanding; spoke a tongue which the people did not comprehend; and was powerful to accomplish nothing by his own will. With the vast possessions and popular qualities of Godwin, there is some credit due to him not to have gone the readiest way to supreme power.

It is difficult to trace the origin of Godwin's greatness. An old MS. Chronicle says that he was the son of a Saxon herdsman. Mr. Turner has given a romantic story from a Northern Saga, which shows how the earl rose from the humblest of the people. After the decisive battle between Canute and Edmund, Ulfr, a Danish chieftain high in the favour of Canute, had been separated from the army. In much danger he passed the night in a wood; and in the morning he saw a lad driving his cattle to pasture. The Dane asked the way to Canute's ships. The boy said, the way was long; the danger was great; he should himself be in peril should he assist one of his country's enemies. Gold was proffered; but the gold was refused. At length young Godwin conducted the thane

to the shelter of his father's house; and finally was his guide to the camp of Canute. His service was rewarded; his talents gained him favour; the chieftain gave him his sister in marriage; and the herdsmen's son—"the child of Sussex"—became the great earl. There were two other mighty chieftains, who divided the kingdom with Godwin and his family, as the delegates of the sovereign: Leofric, who ruled the northern counties of Mercia; and Siward, whose earldom reached from the Humber to the Scottish borders. This was the Siward of Shakspere,—"Warlike Siward"—"Old Siward"—the protector of Malcolm, the son of the murdered Duncan—the father of "young Siward," who perished in the battle-field where Macbeth fell. "Where were his wounds?" said the stout old earl. "In front." "Then I would wish no better fate."

By these powerful nobles was the throne of Edward upheld, at the beginning of his reign. They asserted the Saxon supremacy; and expelled the traitorous or tyrannising Danes from the country. They united in resisting the pretensions of Magnus, the successor of Hardicanute in Denmark, to the English kingdom. But the influence of Godwin and his family soon came to be regarded with suspicion. One of Godwin's sons, Sweyn, was guilty of atrocities, which still indicate a period when violence is the ready instrument of power. He carried off an abbess; and was outlawed. He became a terror of the sea, in the old trade of piracy. At length the king pronounced his pardon to the outlaw; but his brother Harold, and his cousin Beorn, opposed the royal clemency; and Sweyn murdered his cousin. Still he was restored to his estates and honours by the weak-minded king. But his crime was not forgotten. It was one of the causes by which the character of the family of Godwin was lowered; and the influence which they held over the people was for a season diminished. Their strength was, in a short time, to be measured not only with the envy of their rivals, but with the authority of their king. Edward was, however, deficient in force of character, a gentle and merciful ruler. He had abolished the Dane-gelt. Under the old laws, the Saxon and the Dane now lived in peace. They pursued their industrious occupations, and the country was flourishing. The fierce contests about ecclesiastical discipline had passed away. There was no foreign power to disturb the rest of the pacific king. He hunted and he hawked in his forest of Bernwood, near Brill; and there he gave a hunting-horn to Nigel, the huntsman who slew a fierce boar,—the famous Borstal horn, by which the Aubrey family hold the estates

with which the king endowed the boar-slayer. So the lands of the Pusey family are still held by the horn which King Canute bestowed upon their ancestor William. The gentle king was, moreover, a healer of the sick, and a restorer to sight of the blind. It was he who first used "the healing benediction," which he left to "the succeeding royalty," so that even the pious Charles II. "touched" eight thousand five hundred of his afflicted subjects in one year, and a hundred thousand in the course of his reign.* Malmesbury, somewhat damagingly to those who believed, to very recent times, in the virtue of the touch from the legitimate king, imputes the power of Edward to "his personal sanctity," and not to "hereditary virtue in the royal line." With these various occupations, Edward might have lived through a long reign untroubled, could he have forgotten the associations of his years of exile. When he became possessed of the power and riches that belonged to the crown of fertile England, the Normans crowded round him to share the abundance of his treasury. They came to fill the great offices of his household; to be the leaders of his troops; to take the command of his fortresses; to be his spiritual directors; to have the richest abbeys and the most honoured bishoprics. The seal of wax which Edward was the first to affix to his charters, instead of the mark of the cross of the Anglo-Saxon kings, was an offence against the nationality of England. In the place where Edith was queen, her father and brothers spoke their country's speech, and wore their country's long mantle; whilst Edward gathered around him the short-cloaked Normans, and bade his subjects address their petitions to his clerks, who only heard those who could employ the polite Romance-tongue of Normandy. The Norman favourites ridiculed the Saxon earls; and the Saxon earls looked for a day of vengeance upon the Norman favourites.

Eustace, Count of Boulogne, had married Goda, the sister of Edward, who was the widow of Gualtier of Mantes. He came to the court of his brother-in-law, with a great retinue. Here he would meet with bishops and abbots, earls and knights, of French lineage. Radulf, the foreign nephew of the king, was there, all-powerful. Eustace naturally thought that England was a tribute-land for the Normans, and that the Saxon was a born slave. On his return to Boulogne, he had to rest at Dover. Before entering the town he ordered his men to put on their hauberks; and at the

* See a curious account of the resistance of William III. to the continuance of this superstition, in Macaulay's "History of England," vol. iii. p. 478.

head of his followers he demanded quarters of the sturdy householders. We can imagine the stir in the little town under the cliff. The burghers resisted the insolent mandate; and one who refused entrance to the foreigners was slain. Then Count Eustace, when the cry of vengeance rose amongst the people, made a furious onslaught with his spearmen upon the inhabitants, and many fell under the French lances. But it was not their ringed mail that could save them from the swords of the infuriated Kentish men. The burghers hastily armed, and forming themselves in the military order with which they were familiar, encountered the horsemen of Boulogne, and slew nineteen. Then a solitary rider, with a broken plume in his gilt helmet, was madly spurring on the highway, for the people had intercepted his passage to the harbour. A few of his followers came up; and together they took their course along the Watling-street, till they had reached the king's presence at Gloucester. There, surrounded by his Norman court, the pacific king showed unwonted fury against his rebellious subjects, who had resisted the will of his brother-in-law. He sent for Earl Godwin, in whose earldom this outbreak had taken place, and ordered him to visit the people of Dover with a summary vengeance. The earl refused. They should have legal trial in the burh-gemot; he would see justice done; but he would not punish, without a hearing, those whom the king was bound to protect. Suddenly Edward yielded. But the Norman counsellors represented the discretion of Godwin as direct rebellion; and he was summoned to appear before a great council at Gloucester. In his defence of the people of Dover against an illegal chastisement, he had done his strict duty. The eloquent burst of Chatham was as true in the eleventh century as in the eighteenth: "The poorest man in his cottage may bid defiance to all the forces of the Crown. It may be frail; its roof may shake; the storm may enter it; but the king of England cannot enter it. All his power dares not cross the threshold of that ruined tenement." The Anglo-Saxon had the legal right to resist, even to the death, any one who presumed to intrude into his dwelling, as follower of baron or of king. Was then Godwin, in his earldom, to punish those who, in the same spirit of ancient freedom, had resisted an insolent foreigner, because he was the husband of the king's sister? But the discharge of his duty would be no plea for his contumaciousness. While Edward was surrounded by his new favourites, Godwin saw danger; and he came prepared for resistance. The hour for resistance

was come, if Saxon-England were to hold her laws and her independence. He and his sons marched to the west with a large force; and they demanded that Eustace and his men should be delivered to their custody. The Earls Siward and Leofric upheld the king, and mustered their forces. They came unwillingly. They came at first with a few men; but at the entreaties of the king they brought up the militia of their earldoms. The Norman Earl of Worcester joined the party of the king with a more determined spirit, than those felt who were unwilling to draw the sword against their own people. Civil war seemed imminent. "But, inasmuch as the best men in all England were assembled together on his side and theirs, it seemed to Earl Leofric and some others, to be the more prudent part not to begin a battle with their fellow-countrymen; but they proposed that, exchanging hostages, the king and Godwin should, on a day named, meet at London for a conference."* The king, or rather his Norman advisers, employed the interval in raising a great army; whilst Godwin's adherents returned to their homes. The king's army was commanded by Normans. In London, thus beleaguered, was Godwin and his two sons summoned to attend the witan. They demanded hostages for their personal safety; but the demand was refused. Then Godwin and his sons, after a second demand, and a second refusal of hostages, disobeyed the summons. Sweyn, by sentence of the witan, was outlawed. Godwin and Harold were sentenced to banishment—to depart out of England within five days. Harold sailed from Bristol to Ireland; Godwin and Sweyn, from the east coast to Flanders. They, the proudest of the land, were driven from their homes and their large possessions. They had, in the plenitude of their power, pressed hardly upon a weak master; and he, after the fashion of all imbecile and timid rulers, was ready enough to be more oppressive than those who, out of their own strong wills, are calculatingly despotic. The unmanly king extended his revenge to his own wife. He stripped her of every means of independent maintenance—of money, of lands. He plundered her of every womanly ornament. He sent her to the cheerless prison of a monastery,—that of Wherwell, where his own sister, the abbess, would be ready enough to persecute one so fair and so accomplished as Edith, the daughter of the banished earl. The time was fast approaching when no earl would defend a burgher against injustice. One system of government is melting into

* Roger de Hoveden.

another system. Antiquarians, who look upon an old tower like that of Conisborough, on the Don, dispute whether it be of Saxon or Norman origin. It probably belongs to the border-time of each epoch. So the political histories of two periods that we are accustomed to regard as having distinct attributes, are now gradually blending. The Norman influence is ripening into Norman despotism.