he became greatly attached was his second cousin, William, Duke of Normandy.

**109. Restoration of the English Kings; Edward the Confessor (1042–1066).** — The oppressive acts of Canute's sons excited insurrection (1042), and both Danes and Saxons joined in the determination to restore the Saxon line. Edward was invited to accept the crown. He returned to England and obtained the throne. By birth he was already half Norman; by education and tastes he was wholly so.

It is very doubtful whether he could speak a word of English, and it is certain that from the beginning he surrounded himself with French favorites, and filled the Church with French priests. Edward's piety and blameless life gained for him the title of "the Confessor," or, as we should say to-day, "the Christian."

He married the daughter of Godwin, Earl of Wessex, the most powerful noble in England. Godwin really ruled the country in the King's name until his death (1053), when his son Harold succeeded him as earl. The latter continued to exercise his father's influence to counteract the French.

**110. Edward builds Westminster Abbey.** — During a large part of his reign Edward was engaged in building an abbey at the west end of London, and hence called the West-minster.[1] He had just completed and consecrated this great work when he died, and was buried there. We may still see a part of his building in the crypt or basement of the abbey, while the King's tomb above is the centre around which lies a circle of royal graves.

To it multitudes made pilgrimage in the olden time, and once every year a little band of devoted Roman Catholics still gather about it in veneration of virtues that would have adorned a monastery, but had not breadth and vigor to fill a throne.

With Edward, save for the short interlude of Harold, the last of the Saxon kings and the "ablest man of an unprogressive race," the period closes.

[1] Minster: a name given originally to a monastery; next, to a church connected with a monastery; but now applied to several large English cathedrals.

WHITE HORSE HILL, BERKSHIRE

**114. Summary: What the Anglo-Saxons accomplished.** — Thus Jutes, Saxons, Angles, and Danes, whom together we may call the Anglo-Saxons,[1] laid the corner-stone of the English nation. However much it has changed since, it remains, nevertheless, in its solid and fundamental qualities, what these peoples made it.

They gave first the language, simple, strong, direct, and plain, — the familiar, every-day speech of the fireside and the street, the well-known words of both the newspaper and the Bible.

Next they established the government in its main outlines as it still exists; that is, a king, a legislative body representing the people, and the germ, at least, of a judicial system embodying trial by jury (§ 125).

Last, and best, they furnished conservative patience, calm, steady, persistent effort, indomitable tenacity of purpose, and cool, determined courage. These qualities have won glorious battle-fields on both sides the Atlantic, both in peace and war, and who can doubt that they are destined to win still greater victories in the future?

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## GENERAL VIEW OF THE SAXON, OR EARLY ENGLISH, PERIOD (449–1066)[2]

I. GOVERNMENT. — II. RELIGION. — III. MILITARY AFFAIRS. — IV. LITERATURE, LEARNING, AND ART. — V. GENERAL INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE. — VI. MODE OF LIFE, MANNERS, AND CUSTOMS.

### GOVERNMENT

**115. Beginning of the English Monarchy.** — During the greater part of the first four centuries after the Saxon conquest Britain was divided into a number of tribal settlements, or petty kingdoms, held

[1] Anglo-Saxons: some authorities insist that this phrase means the Saxons of England in distinction from those of the continent. It is used here, however, in the sense given by Mr. Freeman as a term describing the people formed in England by the union of all the Germanic tribes.

[2] This section contains a summary of much of the preceding period, with considerable additional matter. It is believed that it will be found useful both for review and for reference. When a continuous narrative history is desired, this, and similar sections following, may be omitted.



by Jutes, Angles, and Saxons, constantly at war with each other. In the ninth century, the West Saxons, or inhabitants of Wessex, succeeded, under the leadership of Egbert, in practically conquering and uniting the country. Egbert now assumed the title of "King of the English," and Britain came to be known, from the name of its largest division, as Angle-Land, or England. Later the Danes obtained possession of a large part of the country, but eventually united with the English and became one people.

**116. The King and the Witan.** — The government of England was vested in an elective sovereign, assisted by the council of the Witan, or Wise Men. It is an open question whether every freeman had the right to attend this national council,[1] but, in practice, the right became confined to a small number of the nobles and clergy.

**117. What the Witan could do.** — 1. The Witan elected the King (its choice being confined, as a rule, to the royal family). 2. In case of misgovernment, it deposed him. 3. It made or confirmed grants of public lands. 4. It acted as a supreme court of justice both in civil and criminal cases. (See Constitutional Summary in Appendix, page ii, § 3.)

**118. What the King and Witan could do.** — 1. They enacted the laws, both civil and ecclesiastical. (In most cases this meant nothing more than stating what the custom was, the common law being merely the common custom.) 2. They levied taxes. 3. They declared war and made peace. 4. They appointed the chief officers and bishops of the realm.

**119. Land Tenure before the Conquest.** — Before they invaded Britain the Saxons and kindred tribes appear to have held their estates in common. Each had a permanent homestead, but that was all.[2] "No one," says Cæsar, "has a fixed quantity of land or boundaries to his property. The magistrates and chiefs assign every year to the families and communities who live together, as much land and in such spots as they think suitable. The following year they require them to take up another allotment.

"The chief glory of the tribes is to have their territory surrounded with as wide a belt as possible of waste land. They deem it not only

[1] Stubbs and Freeman take opposite views on this point.

[2] Tacitus (*Germania*) says that each house "was surrounded by a space of its own."

a special mark of valor that every neighboring tribe should be driven to a distance, and that no stranger should dare to reside in their vicinity, but at the same time they regard it as a precautionary measure against sudden attacks."[1]

**120. Folkland.** — Each tribe, in forming its settlement, seized more land than it actually needed. This excess was known as Folkland (the People's land),[2] and might be used by all alike for pasturing cattle or cutting wood. With the consent of the Witan, the King might grant portions of this Folkland as a reward for services done to himself or to the community. Such grants were usually conditional and could only be made for a time. Eventually they returned to the community.

Other grants, however, might be made in the same way, which conferred full ownership. Such grants were called Bocland (Book land), because conveyed by writing, or registered in a charter or book. In time the King obtained the power of making these grants without having to consult the Witan, and at last the whole of the Folkland came to be regarded as the absolute property of the Crown.

**121. Duties of Freemen.** — Every freeman was obliged to do three things: 1. He must assist in the maintenance of roads and bridges. 2. He must aid in the repair of forts. 3. He must serve in case of war. Whoever neglected or refused to perform this last and most important of all duties was declared to be a "*nithing*," or infamous coward.[3]

**122. The Feudal System** (see, too, Constitutional Summary in Appendix, page iii, § 5). — In addition to the Eorls (earls)[4] or nobles by birth, there gradually grew up a class known as Thanes (companions or servants of the King), who in time outranked the

[1] Cæsar, Gallic War, Book VI.

[2] But some recent authorities regard it as family land.

[3] Also written *Niding*. The English, as a rule, were more afraid of this name than of death itself.

[4] The Saxons, or Early English, were divided into three classes: Eorls (they must not be confounded with the Danish *jarls* or *earls*), who were noble by birth; Ceorls (churls), or simple freemen, and slaves. The slaves were either the absolute property of the master, or were bound to the soil and sold with it. This latter class, under the Norman name of *villeins*, became numerous after the Norman Conquest in the eleventh century. The chieftains of the first Saxon settlers were called either Ealdormen (aldermen) or Heretogas, the first being civil or magisterial, the latter military officers. The Thanes were a later class, who, from serving the King or some powerful leader, became noble by military service.



hereditary nobility. To both these classes the King would have occasion to give rewards for faithful service and for deeds of valor. As his chief wealth consisted in land, he would naturally give that. To this gift, however, a condition was attached. On making such a grant the King required the receiver to agree to furnish a certain number of fully equipped soldiers to fight for him. These grants were originally made for life only, and on the death of the recipient they returned to the Crown.

The nobles and other great landholders, following the example of the King, granted portions of their estates to tenants on similar conditions, and these again might grant portions to those below them in return for satisfactory military or other service.

In time it came to be an established principle, that every freeman below the rank of a noble must be attached to some superior whom he was bound to serve, and who, on the other hand, was his legal protector and responsible for his good behavior. The lordless man was, in fact, a kind of outlaw, and might be seized like a robber. In that respect, therefore, he would be worse off than the slave, who had a master to whom he was accountable and who was accountable for him.

Eventually it became common for the small landholders, especially during the Danish invasions, to seek the protection of some neighboring lord who had a large band of followers at his command. In such cases the freeman gave up his land and received it again on certain conditions. The usual form was for him to kneel and, placing his hands within those of the lord, to swear an oath of homage, saying, "I become your man for the lands which I hold of you, and I will be faithful to you against all men, saving only the service which I owe to my lord the King." On his side the lord solemnly promised to defend his tenant or vassal in the possession of his property, for which he was to perform some service to the lord.

In these two ways, first, by grant of lands from the King or a superior, and, secondly, by the act of homage (known as *commendation*), the feudal system (a name derived from *feodum*, meaning land or property) grew up in England. Its growth, however, was irregular and incomplete; and it should be distinctly understood that it was not until after the Norman Conquest in the eleventh century that it became fully established.

**123. Advantages of Feudalism.** — This system had at that time many advantages. 1. The old method of holding land in common

was a wasteful one, since the way in which the possessor of a field might cultivate it would perhaps spoil it for the one who received it at the next allotment. 2. In an age of constant warfare, feudalism protected all classes better than if they had stood apart, and it enabled the King to raise a powerful and well-armed force in the easiest and quickest manner. 3. It cultivated two important virtues, — fidelity on the part of the vassal, protection on that of the lord. Its corner-stone was the faithfulness of man to man. Society has outgrown feudalism, which like every system had its dark side, but it can never outgrow the feudal principle.

**124. Political Divisions; the Sheriff.** — Politically the kingdom was divided into townships, hundreds (districts furnishing a hundred warriors, or supporting a hundred families), and shires or counties, the shire having been originally, in some cases, the section settled by an independent tribe, as Sussex, Essex, etc.

In each shire the King had an officer, called a shire-reeve or sheriff,[1] who represented him, collected the taxes due the Crown, and saw to the execution of the laws. In like manner, the town and the hundred had a head-man of its own choosing to see to matters of general interest.

**125. The Courts.** — As the nation had its assembly of wise men acting as a high court, so each shire, hundred, and town had its court, which all freemen might attend. There, without any special judge, jury, or lawyers, cases of all kinds were tried and settled by the voice of the entire body, who were both judge and jury in themselves.

**126. Methods of Procedure; Compurgation.** — In these courts there were two methods of procedure: first, the accused might clear himself of the charge brought against him by compurgation[2]; that is, by swearing that he was not guilty and getting a number of reputable neighbors to swear that they believed his oath.

If their oaths were not satisfactory, witnesses might be brought to swear to some particular fact. In every case the value of the oath was graduated according to the rank of the person, that of a man of high rank being worth as much as that of twelve common men.

**127. The Ordeal.** — If the accused could not clear himself in this way, he was obliged to submit to the ordeal.[3] This usually consisted

[1] Reeve: a man in authority, or having charge of something.
[2] Compurgation: the act of wholly purifying or clearing a person from guilt.
[3] Ordeal: judgment.



in carrying a piece of hot iron a certain distance, or in plunging the arm up to the elbow in boiling water.

The person who underwent the ordeal appealed to God to prove his innocence by protecting him from harm. Rude as both these methods were, they were better than the old tribal method, which permitted every man or every man's family to be the avenger of his wrongs.

**128. The Common Law.** — The laws by which these cases were tried were almost always ancient customs, few of which had been reduced to writing. They formed that body of common law[1] which is the foundation of the modern system of justice both in England and America.

**129. Penalties.** — The penalties inflicted by these courts consisted chiefly of fines. Each man's life had a certain "*wergild*" or money value. The fine for the murder of a man of very high rank was 2400 shillings; that of a simple freeman was only one-twelfth as much.

A slave could neither testify in court nor be punished by the court; for the man in that day who held no land had no rights. If a slave was convicted of crime, his master paid the fine and then took what he considered an equivalent with the lash. Treason was punished with death, and common scolds were ducked in a pond until they were glad to hold their tongues.

### RELIGION

**130. The Ancient Saxon Faith.** — Before their conversion to Christianity, the Saxons worshipped Woden and Thor, names preserved in Wednesday (Woden's day) and Thursday (Thor's day). The first appears to have been considered the creator and ruler of heaven and earth; the second was his son, the god of thunder, slayer of evil spirits, and friend of man.

The essential element of their religion was the deification of strength, courage, and fortitude. It was a faith well suited to a warlike people. It taught that there was a heaven for the brave and a hell for cowards.

**131. What Christianity did.** — Christianity, on the contrary, laid emphasis on the virtues of self-sacrifice and sympathy. It took the side of the weak and the helpless. The church itself held slaves, yet

[1] So called, in distinction from the later statute laws made by Parliament and other legislative bodies.

it labored for emancipation. It built monasteries and encouraged industry and education. The church edifice was a kind of open Bible.

Very few who entered it could spell out a single word of either Old or New Testament, but all, from the poorest peasant or meanest slave up to the greatest noble, could read the meaning of the Scripture histories painted on wall and window.

The church, furthermore, was a peculiarly sacred place. It was powerful to shield those who were in danger. If a criminal, or a person fleeing from vengeance, took refuge in it, he could not be seized until forty days had expired, during which time he had the privilege of leaving the kingdom and going into exile.

This "right of sanctuary" was often a needful protection in an age of violence. It became, however, in time, an intolerable nuisance, since it enabled robbers and desperadoes of all kinds to defy the law. The right was modified at different times, but was not wholly abolished until 1624, in the reign of James I.

### MILITARY AFFAIRS

**132. The Army.** — The army consisted of a national militia, or "*fyrd*," and a feudal militia. From the earliest times all freemen were obliged to fight in the defence of the country. Under the feudal system, every large landholder had to furnish the King a stipulated number of men, fully equipped with armor and weapons. As this method was found more effective than the first, it gradually superseded it.

The Saxons always fought on foot. They wore helmets and rude, flexible armor, formed of iron rings, or of stout leather covered with small plates of iron and other substances. They carried oval-shaped shields. Their chief weapons were the spear, javelin, battle-axe, and sword. The wars of this period were those of the different tribes seeking supremacy, or of the English with the Danes.

**133. The Navy.** — Until Alfred's reign the English had no navy. From that period they maintained a fleet of small war-ships to protect the coast from invasion. Most of these vessels appear to have been furnished by certain ports on the south coast.

### LITERATURE, LEARNING, AND ART

**134. Runes.** — The language of the Saxons was of Low-German origin. Many of the words resemble the German of the present day. When written, the characters were called *runes*, mysteries or secrets.



The chief use of these runes was to mark a sword-hilt, or some article of value, or to form a charm against evil and witchcraft.

It is supposed that one of the earliest runic inscriptions is the following, which dates from about 400 A.D. It is cut on a drinking-horn,[1] and (reproduced in English characters) stands thus: —

EK HLEWAGASTIR . HOLTINGAR . HORNA . TAWIDO.

*I, Hlewagastir, son of Holta, made the horn.*

With the introduction of Christianity the Latin alphabet, from which our modern English alphabet is derived, took the place of the runic characters, which bore some resemblance to Greek, and English literature began with the coming of the monks.

**135. The First Books.** — One of the first English books was the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a history covering a period of about twelve hundred years, beginning with the Roman invasion and ending in the year 1154.

Though written in prose, it contains various fragments of poetry, of which the following (rendered into modern English), on the death of Edward the Confessor (1066), may be quoted as an example: —

"Then suddenly came
Death the bitter
And that dear prince seized.
Angels bore
His steadfast soul
Into heaven's light.
But the wise King
Bestowed his realm
On one grown great,
On Harold's self,
A noble Earl!
Who in all times
Faithfully hearkened
Unto his lord
In word and deed,
Nor ever failed
In aught the King
Had needed of him!"

Other early books were Cædmon's poem of the Creation, also in English, and Bede's church history of Britain, written in Latin, a work giving a full and most interesting account of the coming of Augustine and his first preaching in Kent. All of these books were written by the monks.

**136. Art.** — The English were skilful workers in metal, especially in gold and silver, and also in the illumination of manuscripts.[2] Alfred's Jewel, a fine specimen of the blue enamelled gold of the

[1] The golden horn of Gallehas, found on the Danish-German frontier.

[2] These illuminations get their name from the gold, silver, and bright colors used in the pictures, borders, and decorated letters with which the monks ornamented these books. For beautiful specimens of the work, see Silvestre's Paléographie.

ninth century, is preserved in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. It bears the inscription: "Alfred me heht gewurcan," *Alfred caused me to be worked* [*or made*].

The women of that period excelled in weaving fine linen and woollen cloth and in embroidering tapestry.

**137. Architecture.** — In architecture no advance took place until very late. Up to the year 1000 the general belief that the world would end with the close of the year 999 prevented men from building for permanence. The small ancient church at Bradford-on-Avon belongs to the Saxon period. The Saxon stone work exhibited in a few buildings like the church-tower of Earl's Barton, Northamptonshire, is an attempt to imitate timber with stone, and has been called "stone carpentry."[1] Edward the Confessor's work in Westminster Abbey was not Saxon, but Norman, he having obtained his plans, and probably his builders, from Normandy.

### GENERAL INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE

**138. Farms; Slave Trade.** — The farming of this period, except on the church lands, was of the rudest description. Grain was ground by the women and slaves in stone hand-mills. Later, the mills were driven by wind or water power. The principal commerce was in wool, lead, tin, and slaves. A writer of that time says he used to see long trains of young men and women tied together, offered for sale, "for men were not ashamed," he adds, "to sell their nearest relatives, and even their own children."

### MODE OF LIFE, MANNERS, AND CUSTOMS

**139. The Town.** — The first Saxon settlements were quite generally on the line of the old Roman roads. They were surrounded by a rampart of earth set with a thick hedge or with rows of sharp stakes. Outside this was a deep ditch. These places were called towns, from "*tun*," meaning a fence or hedge. Certain towns were called "*burghs*."[2]

**140. The Hall.** — The buildings in these towns were of wood. Those of the lords or chief men were called "halls," from the fact that they consisted mainly of a hall, or large room, used as a sitting, eating, and often as a sleeping room, — a bundle of straw or some

[1] See Parker's Introduction to Gothic Architecture for illustrations of this work.

[2] One or more houses might constitute a town. A single farmhouse is still so called in Scotland. The chief fortified towns were called "*burghs*" or *boroughs*.



skins thrown on the floor serving for beds. There were no chimneys, but a hole in the roof let out the smoke. If the owner was rich, the walls would be decorated with bright-colored tapestry, and with suits of armor and shields hanging from pegs.

**141. Life in the Hall.** — Here in the evening the master supped on a raised platform at one end of the "hall," while his followers ate at a lower table.

The Saxons were hard drinkers as well as hard fighters. After the meal, while horns of ale and mead were circulating, the minstrels, taking their harps, would sing songs of battle and ballads of wild adventure.

Outside the "hall" were the "bowers," or chambers for the master and his family, and, perhaps, an upper chamber for a guest, called later by the Normans a *sollar*, or sunny room.

If a stranger approached a town, he was obliged to blow a horn; otherwise he might be slain as an outlaw.

Here in the midst of rude plenty the Saxons, or Early English, lived a life of sturdy independence. They were rough, strong, outspoken, and fearless. Theirs was not the nimble brain, for that was to come with another people, though a people originally of the same race. Their mission was to lay the foundation; or, in other words, to furnish the muscle, grit, and endurance, without which the nimble brain is of little permanent value.

**142. Guilds.** — The inhabitants of the towns and cities had various associations called guilds (from *gild*, a payment or contribution). The object of these was mutual assistance. The most important were the Peace-guilds[1] and the Merchant-guilds. The former constituted a voluntary police force to preserve order and bring thieves to punishment.

Each member contributed a small sum to form a common fund which was used to make good any losses incurred by robbery or fire. The association held itself responsible for the good behavior of its members, and kept a sharp eye on strangers and stragglers, who had to give an account of themselves or leave the country.

The Merchant-guilds were organized, apparently at a late period, to protect and extend trade. After the Norman Conquest they came to be very wealthy and influential. In addition to the above, there were social and religious guilds which made provision for feasts, for maintenance of religious services, and for the relief of the poor and the sick.

[1] Frithgilds.