

CHAPTER II.

LITERATURE OF THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD.

A. D. 450 to 1066.

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

1. BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF EARLY BRITISH HISTORY.—Great Britain comprises England, Scotland, and Wales. The *Celts* were the sole masters of all that fine island from the earliest times to the invasion of *Julius Cæsar* in the year 55 B. C. The Roman power in England may be said to extend over a period of nearly four hundred years, during which the native Celts or Britons made considerable advancement in letters and civilization, and were even converted to Christianity.

The arrival of the *Angles*, *Saxons*, and *Jutes*, in A. D. 450, is the beginning of an important era in the history of England. Those bold invaders were roving, pagan barbarians,* without arts, literature, or civilization. They drove out or exterminated the native Celts, many of whom found a refuge in the mountains of Wales, or on the shores of France.† But all

* That the Angles and Saxons were pagans, we still have a remarkable proof in the names which they gave to the days of the week, before their conversion, and retained ever since *Sunday* and *Monday* were named after the sun and the moon; *Tuesday*, after *Tieu*, the god of the Teutons; *Wednesday*, after *Woden*, the god of war; *Thursday*, after *Thor*, the god of thunder; *Friday*, after *Freya*, the northern Venus; and *Saturday*, after *Saetes*, a water god.

† Where the exiled Britons founded a province, named after them

this did not occur in a summer. For more than a hundred and fifty years the Britons maintained a heroic resistance against the foreign foe.

During that period of wild conflict nearly every trace of Christianity and civilization was swept from the soil of England by the ruthless Saxon. What remained of religion and refinement sought a home in Wales, Cornwall, or along the western coast. Finally, however, after long years of bloodshed and fire-and-sword rule, the foundation of the *Saxon Heptarchy* was laid in the year 586.

The Heptarchy, during its continuance of nearly two centuries and a half, presents to the eye, in a political aspect, little else than one unvaried scene of war. Egbert by uniting the seven kingdoms into one, in 827, laid the foundation of the English monarchy; but before his death he saw his dominions ravaged by hordes of warlike freebooters, called *Danes*.*

For over two hundred years they were the scourge of England. The bold genius of Alfred the Great checked them for a time; but his successors lacking his watchful energy, the Danes at length became masters of England, the throne of which they held for about a quarter of a century, when the Saxon line was restored in the person of Edward the Confessor, at

Brittany, or *Bretagne*; and there to this day can be seen the hardy, faithful descendants of the ancient Britons, still speaking the Celtic language of their forefathers. "About the year 458," writes *Lobineau*, "the inhabitants of the island of Britain, flying from the swords of the Saxons, gave to a portion of the territory of Armorica the name of *Bretagne*."—*Hist. de la Bretagne*.

* In those early ages the term *Danes* was a common name for bands of roving pirates from the countries around the Baltic Sea. The name was not then limited to the inhabitants of the little peninsula now called Denmark. Time makes many changes. The first notice of the appearance of the Danes in England occurs in the *Saxon Chronicle* under the year 787.

whose death, in 1066, William the Conqueror invaded England.

2. SCOTLAND FROM 500 TO 1066.—Before the end of the fifth century Scotland was divided between two races—the *Picts** and the *Scots*. The Picts occupied the northeastern provinces of Scotland, while the Scots—a colony from Ireland, then called *Scotia*—ruled all the western portions, including the islands. The country was named *Caledonia*,† and the language spoken was the Celtic. In 843 the Scots became the ruling race under Kenneth, who was the first king of all Scotland. The Picts and Scots gradually coalesced into one people. Nothing more of political importance occurred in Scotland during the period under consideration.‡

✓3. THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION AS THE EARLY CIVILIZER OF GREAT BRITAIN.—The Catholic Church was the great civilizer of Europe. With religion came law, refinement, and literature. Learning has ever found a home under the protection of the Cross; and in tracing the progress of letters in Great Britain, it becomes necessary to say a word about the introduction of the Christian Religion.

The apostle and monastic hero of Caledonia was the renowned *St. Columbkille*. A prince of one of the ancient royal houses of Ireland, he began his missionary career in Scotland by founding a monastery on the little isle of Iona§ in the year 563. For over a third of a century he traversed those wild northern

* The Picts, like the Scots or Irish, were a Celtic race.

† Which is still the poetic name of Scotland.

‡ The name *Scotland* seems first to have been given to the united kingdom of the Picts and Scots in the tenth century. Ireland, it must be remembered, was the *ancient Scotia*, and the Irish the *ancient Scots*.

§ It is only three miles long by about two in width.

regions—regions inaccessible to the Roman eagle—and at the sight of his miracles and preaching the fierce and stubborn Pict bowed beneath the cross and became a Catholic. This royal monk laid the foundation of Christianity, civilization, and literature in Scotland. The remains of fifty-three of his monasteries are yet to be seen. The noble figure of Columbkille, poet, prince, monk, and missionary, towers aloft in that dim and distant age. His is the brightest name in the early annals of Great Britain. From his famous monastery of Iona religion and learning flashed their genial rays over the neighboring kingdoms. It was “the luminary of the Caledonian regions.” Columbkille* ended his illustrious career in 597—the very year that St. Augustine converted the king of Kent. The remains of the Saint were interred at Iona, which, for over two hundred years, was regarded as the most celebrated spot in Europe. At his feet seventy kings were buried. The ninth century, however, had scarcely dawned, when this world-renowned shrine was burned and plundered by the Danes; and from that time “the radiant centre from which Christian civilization shone upon the British Isles grew dim.”†

To *St. Augustine* and his forty companions—sent from Rome by *Pope St. Gregory the Great* ‡ in 596—belong the honor of having converted the kingdom of

* Columbkille is the Irish form of the name, which is often written *Columba*.

† The sacking of Iona is thus recorded in the *Annals of the Four Masters*: “The age of Christ 801. Hi-Colum-kille (Iona) was plundered by foreigners, and great numbers of the laity and clergy were killed by them—namely, sixty-eight.” (Vol. I. p. 411.) For safety, towards the close of the same century, the sacred remains of St. Columbkille were transferred to Ireland.

‡ One day the great and holy Gregory chanced to walk through the market-place in Rome. He saw several young slaves for sale,

Kent to Christianity. The former landmarks of religion in England had been swept away. "Here and there," says Montalembert, "might be a ruined church, but not one living Christian among the natives." St. Augustine, at the invitation of the good king Ethelbert whom he had converted, fixed his see at Canterbury, the capital of Kent; and there were founded the *first* Catholic church, the *first* monastery, the *first* school, and the *first* library in the Saxon Heptarchy. In 601 Pope Gregory the Great sent over the books to form the first English library. Some of these manuscript volumes still existed in the reign of Henry VIII.; and there is even yet preserved in one of the libraries of Cambridge University a Latin manuscript of the Gospels, which is believed to have been brought from Rome by St. Augustine.

Northumbria and the three other northern kingdoms of the Heptarchy are indebted to Irish monks, from the famed monastery of Iona, for religion and literature. *St. Aidan* and his Irish fellow-laborers established a monastery, which afterwards became celebrated, in the little island of Lindisfarne, now called

and was struck with the beauty of their countenances. He made inquiries as to their country and religion. The slave-dealer informed him that they came from the island of Britain, and that they were heathen. "What evil luck," cried Gregory, heaving a deep sigh, "that the Prince of Darkness should possess beings with an aspect so radiant, and that the grace of these countenances should reflect a soul void of the inward grace! Of what nation are they?" "They are Angles," was the reply. "They are well named," continued Gregory, "for these Angles have the faces of angels; and they must become the brethren of the angels in heaven. From what province have they been brought?" "From Deira" (in Northumbria). "Still good," answered he. "*De ira eruti*—they shall be snatched from the ire of God, and called to the mercy of Christ. And how name they the king of their country?" "Alle." "So be it; he is right well named, for they shall soon sing the *alleluia* in his kingdom." Gregory purchased the captive Saxons, and the purchase of these three or four slaves was the origin of the redemption of all England.—*Montalembert*.

Holy Island. From this retreat they sallied forth, carrying religion and learning among the pagan inhabitants of Northern England. The two remaining kingdoms of the Heptarchy were converted by the combined efforts of the Irish and Italian monks.

4. THE MONASTERIES AND LITERATURE.—Religion having established its benign sway over the land, science and literature soon followed in its wake. In those days every monastery was a school, and the monks were the guardians of knowledge.* The principal religious houses had each its *Scriptorium*, in which the Sacred Scriptures, the classics, and all the great works of the ancients which have passed down to modern times were faithfully copied.† To the monastery prince and peasant alike went in quest of learning. Many of these institutions were founded and presided over by Irishmen, for at that time Ireland sent forth the most renowned scholars in Europe.

In the latter part of the seventh century the English monasteries made great literary progress, under two illustrious foreigners—*St. Theodore*, who became archbishop of Canterbury in 669, and his companion the *Abbot St. Adrian*. The former was a native of Asia Minor, the latter by birth an African; and both were deeply versed in all the learning of their age. They expounded Holy Scripture, and taught Latin, Greek,‡ mathematics, astronomy, music, and other

* According to Edmund Burke, it was St. Theodore who *first* introduced the study of Greek—his native language—into England.

† Among the Anglo-Saxons, as well as among the Celts of Ireland, Caledonia, and Cambria, monasteries were the sole centres of a religious and liberal education, and knowledge was there at once much sought, very varied, and very literary.—*Montalembert*.

‡ Without the indefatigable industry of the monks we would not now be able to feast on the eloquence of Cicero and Demosthenes, nor be charmed with the beautiful strains of Homer and Virgil.—*Spalding*.

sciences in the schools of Canterbury. Under these two monks England—for the first time—became an important literary centre.

Among the monasteries which at that period ranked high as seats of learning were *Iona*, in Scotland; *Lindisfarne*, *Yarrow*, *Wearmouth*, *York*, and *Whitby* in Northern, and *Canterbury*, *Malmesbury*, and *Glastonbury* in Southern England. Wales had its great houses of *Llancarvan* and *Bangor*, the latter of which contained over 2000 monks. As schools, *Oxford University* may be traced back to the seventh, and *Cambridge University* to the ninth century.

Such a blossoming of human thought, of study and knowledge, of poetry and eloquence, in the bosom of a fighting and barbarous race, still seemingly absorbed by wars, invasions, dynastic and domestic revolutions, and all the storms and blunders which characterize the childhood of society, is truly a touching and wonderful sight.*

Anglo-Saxon scholarship culminated in the *Venerable Bede*, and then began a decline which, unhappily, was hastened by the ravages of the Danes, who destroyed the churches and monasteries—the only colleges of that age.

It has been well said that the monks made Christian Britain. "The English before their arrival," writes Alban Butler, "were a barbarous nation—utter strangers to the very names of the sciences and the liberal arts. When the monks first came to Britain the inhabitants seem not so much as to have known

* Even the Anglo-Saxon ladies were well educated, for it was to them that St. Aldhelm addressed his work, *De Laude Virginitatis* (The Praise of Virginity), and St. Boniface corresponded with ladies in Latin.

the use of letters, but to have borrowed their first alphabet from the Irish."

5. PRINCIPAL WRITERS OF THIS PERIOD.—About eighty British writers, many of them men of note, adorned the period which lies between the introduction of Christianity and the date of the Norman Conquest. But the names of CÆDMON (kad'-mon), ALDHELM, BEDE (beed), ALCUIN (äl'-kwin), and ALFRED THE GREAT are the most brilliant of the literary lights that shone in those past ages of English story. Scotland, however, produced the earliest known British writer—ST. GILDAS THE WISE, a prince and monk, who was born at Dunbarton on the Clyde in 516. He was educated in Ireland, and died about the year 570. His best-known work is a *History of the Britons*, written in Latin, and recently translated into English. Gildas was a true Celt, and detested all invaders, Saxon or Roman. "The nefarious Saxon of detestable name," he writes, "hated alike by God and man—a band of devils breaking forth from the den of the barbarian lioness." Montalembert styles Gildas "the most trustworthy of the British annalists."

6. HOW PROSE COMES AFTER POETRY.—The early literature of every nation commonly bursts forth in the form of songs and rude poetry. It is often unwritten. It is always the language of passion and imagination. The oldest monuments of Anglo-Saxon literature are the poems of the venerable monk Cædmon, and the singular epic, named after its hero, *Beowulf*. The *Beowulf* is a poem of over 6000 lines, and is one of the greatest literary curiosities in existence.* Prose is of later growth than poetry. It

* The *Beowulf* seems to be a poem of the eighth century, but the author is unknown. The wild scenes pictured are laid chiefly in

is the form in which cultivated reason and calm judgment best find expression; and it attains perfection only in the more mature stages of language and civilization. ✓

LESSON I. ✓

CÆDMON. DIED 680.

Works: *Anglo-Saxon Poems on Religious Subjects.*

1. Who was Cædmon?

He was a venerable monk of Whitby, who is justly honored in our literature with the title of "Father of Anglo-Saxon Song."

2. Is there anything remarkable about his life?

His life is one of the most remarkable in all literature. From a simple cowherd he was immediately transformed into a gifted poet and monk.

Denmark. *Hrothgar*, the Danish king, builds a great banquet-hall. Daily it echoes the sounds of song and dance and feasting. But a grim and greedy giant soon puts in an appearance. He is called Grendel. He enters the hall when all are at rest, and seizing thirty of the king's guests, he makes them his prey, and hurries homewards. He repeats such visits. Monarch, warrior, and peasant tremble at the monster's name. The havoc made by Grendel, however, reached the ears of the brave Beowulf. He came with his hardy companions to conquer the man-eating fiend. Hrothgar receives him with great joy. Night comes, and the men seek their beds. When all is still Grendel arrives. The hungry giant hopes to have a dainty feast. He seizes a sleeping warrior, drinks his blood, and devours him body and bones. He then takes hold of Beowulf; but soon the monster feels that he is seized in return by an iron grip. He grows afraid. He tries to run, but he cannot. The hero holds him, and the warriors grasp their swords. After a fearful encounter the worsted giant, with bruised and broken limbs, seeks his wild sea-home. But Beowulf follows, and after a fierce struggle with the mother of the monster, who attacks him in the guise of a sea-wolf, he kills her, and then destroys Grendel. Upon the death of Hrothgar, Beowulf receives his reward. He is made king of Denmark.

3. Tell how it occurred.

Up to an advanced age Cædmon was a cowherd, devout but simple and very ignorant. His natural dulness even prevented him from taking an active part in the evening songs and music of his rustic companions. One night, while asleep, a voice commanded him to sing about the creation. After some hesitation he obeyed; and when he awoke in the morning the words of his song still lingered in his memory.*

4. What is related of his life after this event?

Through the influence of the holy princess St. Hilda he was received into the celebrated monastery of Whitby, where, as monk and poet, he spent the remainder of his days in praising God.

5. Was his gift of poetry permanent?

It was; his talents and poetic faculty grew day by day, and he was ever grateful for the gifts he had received.

6. How did he die?

Having lived as a saint, "he died as poets seldom die." After receiving the *Holy Viaticum*, he made the sign of the cross, and gently expired at a good old age.

* During his slumber he heard a voice, which called him by name and said to him, "Sing me something." Cædmon replied, "I cannot sing, and that is why I have left the supper and come here." "No matter," said the voice, "sing." "But, then, what shall I sing?" he replied. "Sing the beginning of the world," continued the voice—"sing the creation." On receiving this command, he at once began to sing verses of which before he had no knowledge, but which celebrated the glory and power of the Creator, the eternal God, Worker of all marvels, Father of the human race, who had given to the sons of men the heavens for their roof, and the earth for their dwelling-place. On awaking, Cædmon recollected all that he had sung in his dream, and hastened to tell all that had happened to him to the farmer in whose service he was.—*Montalembert.*

7. Of what did his literary works consist?

Of poems on Scriptural and other religious subjects.

8. Explain more clearly what he versified.

A great portion of the Bible: he put into verse the whole of Genesis, with other parts of the old Testament; and afterwards the life and passion of our Lord, and the Acts of the Apostles.

9. What modern English poet, in his celebrated epic, seems to be much indebted to Cædmon?

Milton, whose *Paradise Lost*, in more than one passage, reveals the fact that he borrowed much from Cædmon. The old monk of Whitby sang of the revolt of Satan and Paradise lost a thousand years before Milton.*

10. What does the Venerable Bede say of Cædmon's sacred songs?

"No Englishman has ever written religious poems to equal those that were written by a man who had only God for his master."

11. What does Montalembert remark of Cædmon and his poems?

"No unworthy subject ever inspired his verse, and

* The following is the soliloquy that Cædmon puts into the mouth of Satan after that dark personage was hurled into hell:

"Is this the narrow spot in which my Master shuts me up? How different from the dwellings that we know on high in the kingdom of heaven! Oh, if I had the free power of my hands, and if I could issue forth for once—for one winter only—I and my army! But bands of iron surround me; chains bind me down helpless. I am without a kingdom. The fetters of hell shackle me so firmly—clasp me so tightly! Here are huge flames; above and below I have never seen so horrible a place. The fire never languishes; its heat ascends above hell. The rings that encircle me, the manacles that gnaw my flesh, keep me from advancing, and close the way before me; my feet are tied, my hands imprisoned. Thus has God shut me in."

What a sublime passage! As a recent critic remarks, "it is more than probable that Milton borrowed the ideas of his sublime soliloquy of Satan in Pandemonium from this Saxon monk."

nothing in the whole history of European literature is more original or more religious than this first utterance of the English muse."

LESSON II.

ST. ALDHELM. DIED 709.

Works: (1) *The Praise of Virginity*.
(2) *Anglo-Saxon Poems*. (Lost.)

12. For what is St. Aldhelm remarkable?

He was the *first* of the Anglo-Saxons who became celebrated as a Latin author, and whose works yet remain.

13. What was his social rank?

He was a prince of the royal house of Wessex.

14. By whom and where was he educated?

By the learned abbot St. Adrian, who presided over the celebrated school of Canterbury.* Aldhelm was devoted from youth to religious and literary studies.

15. What monastery did he afterwards enter?

The great monastery of Malmesbury, founded by an Irish monk † whom Aldhelm succeeded as abbot. He retained this dignity for thirty years, but was afterwards consecrated bishop.

16. What may be said of his learning?

The most learned Englishman of his time, he was a thorough master of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Sacred

* "It is you, my beloved," wrote Aldhelm to Adrian many years after, "who have been the venerable teacher of my rude infancy; it is you whom I embrace with the effusion of a pure tenderness, longing much to return to you."

† *Márdulf*.

Scripture, Roman law, arithmetic, astronomy, and music.

17. What is related of his character?

He was a man of kind and gentle heart, a diligent student, and led a singularly pure and austere life.

18. What was his principal work?

A Latin treatise entitled the "Praise of Virginity," the first part of which is in prose, the remainder consisting of a long poem.

19. Give an idea of how the subject is treated?

Besides his own remarks, he inserts at length the high commendations which St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and other Fathers bestow on the state of virginity, and gives abridged examples of many holy virgins.

20. What is said of his style?

While his matter is always good, the same cannot be said of his style, which is stiff and labored. He has neither the fiery originality of Cædmon nor the free and elegant simplicity of Bede.*

21. Did he compose anything in his native Anglo-Saxon?

He was the author of many popular Anglo-Saxon poems which have since been lost.†

* The following serious but beautiful passage is from one of Aldhelm's letters to his dear friend *Acircuis*, a Northumbrian chief: "Let not the sound of the last trumpet depart from your ears; let it recall to you day and night the Book of the Law, which ought to be meditated day and night. You will never sin if you think always of your last end. What is our prosperity here below?—a dream, a vapor, the foam on the sea. God grant that the possession of present good may not hold to us the place of future recompense; and that the abundance of that which perishes may not be followed by the death of that which endures. I ask this for you and for myself, from Him who for us has hung upon the cross."

† Alfred the Great styled St. Aldhelm "the prince of Anglo-Saxon poetry."

Eight centuries after St. Aldhelm's death his feast was still celebrated at Malmesbury by such a crowd of worshippers that, according to Camden, the presence of a troop of soldiers was necessary to prevent disorder. Then came the Reformation of Henry

LESSON III.

ST. BEDE, COMMONLY CALLED "THE VENERABLE."

DIED 735.

Works: (1) *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation.*
(2) *Forty-four* other works.

22. What may be said of the Venerable Bede's rank in literature?

The Venerable Bede is the greatest name in the literature of the whole Anglo-Saxon period. He is often called the "Father of British History" and the "Father of English Learning."

23. What does the word Bede signify?

Bede, in Anglo Saxon, means *prayer*.

24. Where was he born?

In the north of England, near the mouth of the Tyne.

25. Where did he receive his education?

In the monastery of Yarrow, in which he lived from his seventh year up to the date of his death.

26. To what Religious Order did he belong?

He was a Benedictine monk, and was ordained deacon in his nineteenth year, and priest at thirty.

27. How did he spend his life?

In the quiet of his monastery, where he tells us the delight of his life was "to learn, to teach, and to write." He modestly shunned all honors, cared only

VIII. with its usual train of devastations. The magnificent church of Malmesbury would have been razed to the ground had not a weaver bought it from the king to establish his looms there. The monastery was sacked. *The precious manuscripts of the library were long employed to fill up broken windows in the neighboring houses, or to light the bakers' fires.—Montalembert.*

for virtue and knowledge, and was one of the best examples of the perfect student in all history.

28. For what was he especially renowned during his lifetime?

As one of the greatest educators in Europe. He daily gave instruction to over 600 monks; and some of the most illustrious men of his age considered it an honor to say that they had been Bede's pupils.

29. What honorable rank does he hold in the Church?

The Venerable Bede is one of the Fathers of the Church.

30. Is there anything singular about the manner of his death?

It is one of the most touching and beautiful in the history of mankind. Having lived as a saint and scholar, he died as he had lived—at his work.*

LESSON IV.

VENERABLE BEDE, CONTINUED.

31. Which is the principal work of the Venerable Bede?

The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation.

* Bede's last days were devoted to the translation of the *Gospel of St. John* into Anglo-Saxon. Even severe illness could not prevent his pushing on the work with the help of a young secretary. The evening before the Feast of the Ascension, 735, it was all completed except a few lines. "Most dear master," whispered the young monk, "there is still one sentence unwritten." "Write quickly," answered Bede. A few minutes passed, and the other remarked, "It is now done." "You have well said," replied the dying Bede. "It is now done; indeed, all is finished! Dear child, hold my head that I may have the pleasure of looking towards the little oratory where I was wont to pray; and that while I am sitting I may call upon my Heavenly Father and sing, 'Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.'" And as the last word passed from his lips, the Venerable Bede breathed his soul to God. He was 63 years of age.

32. Of what does this excellent work treat, and how is it divided?

Its name indicates its subject. It is a complete history of the Catholic Church in England from the arrival of St. Augustine till the year 731—or four years before the death of Bede. The work is divided into twenty-four chapters.*

33. In what language did Bede write nearly all his books?

In Latin. His Church History has often been translated into English.

34. Of what do the majority of his other works treat?

The majority of them were commentaries on Holy Scripture and various other theological topics.

35. On which of the sciences did he write treatises?

All the sciences of his age and every branch of literature were handled by the Venerable Bede. He wrote works on astronomy, philosophy, chronology, music, geography, arithmetic, medicine, grammar, and rhetoric.†

36. What are the merits of his Church History?

It is a book unrivalled among the early historical works of Christianity.

37. What may be further said of Bede's scholarship?

He was an almost universal genius. As a critic he was just, able, and penetrating. As a writer, both prose and poetry were equally within his grasp. And

* In the preface Bede touchingly writes: "I entreat all those of our nation who read this *History*, or hear it read, to recommend often to the Divine mercy the infirmities of my body and of my soul. Let each man in his province, seeing the care which I have taken to note down everything that is memorable or agreeable to the inhabitants of each district, pay me back by praying for me."

† Here is the touching prayer with which that venerable scholar ends the list of his literary labors: "O good Jesus, who hast deigned to refresh my soul with the sweet streams of knowledge, grant that I may one day mount to Thee who art the source of all wisdom, and remain forever in Thy divine presence."

taking him all in all, he is "the brightest ornament of the English nation."

38. What does the Protestant writer Bayle say of Bede?

Bayle remarks that in eloquence and copiousness of style he was unsurpassed, and that there is scarce anything in all antiquity worthy to be read which is not found in Bede.

39. Mention the only interesting relic of this famous man which has passed down to our own times?

An old oaken chair which the venerable monk is supposed to have used.

40. How did the infamous Henry VII. show his respect for the "Father of English Learning"?

He plundered and destroyed the beautiful shrine in which the Venerable Bede's remains were deposited.*

LESSON V.

ALCUIN. DIED 804.

Works: (1) *Epistles and Poems.* (Latin.)
(2) *Numerous Theological Works.* (Latin.)

41. Who was Alcuin?

After the Venerable Bede, he was perhaps the most renowned scholar of the Anglo-Saxon period.

42. Where was he born and educated?

He was a native of York, of a noble family, and

* The monastic sanctuary towards which the dying look of Bede was turned still remains in part, if we may believe the best archaeologists, and his memory has survived the changes of time. An old oaken chair is still shown which he is supposed to have used. It is the only existing relic of this great saint. . . . His relics at Durham were an object of veneration to the faithful up to the general profanation under Henry VIII., who pulled down the shrine and threw the bones on a dunghill along with those of all the other holy apostles and martyrs of Northumberland.—*Montalembert.*

received his education in the great monastic school of that city.

43. What state of life did he embrace?

He became a Benedictine monk.

44. Where did he first obtain renown as a great teacher and scholar?

In the celebrated monastic school of his native city.

45. At the court of what famous emperor did he afterwards spend the greater portion of his life?

That of the Emperor Charlemagne, at whose repeated entreaties he went to Paris, where he established the greatest school in Europe.

46. How did Charlemagne honor Alcuin?

He honored him as his special friend, counsellor, and teacher, "and usually called him his master."

47. How long did he live in France?

From about 780 up to the date of his death, which occurred at Tours in 804. Alcuin's great learning adorned a foreign country, but the glory is not lost to his native land.

48. Which are his principal works that belong to literature?

His letters and poems—all in Latin. The former—about two hundred in number—are generally addressed to kings, queens, prelates, and other high personages.*

* In a letter to the monks of Yarrow, Alcuin writes: "Remember the nobility of your fathers, and be not the unworthy sons of such great ancestors; look at your many books, at the beauty of your churches and monastic buildings. Let your young men learn to persevere in the praises of God, and not in driving foxes out of their holes, or wearing out their strength running after hares. What folly to leave the footsteps of Christ, and run after the trail of a fox! Look at the noblest doctor of our country, Bede; see what zeal he showed for knowledge from his youth, and the glory which he has received among men—though that is much less important and less dazzling than his reward before God. Stir up, then, the minds of your sleepers by his example. Study his works,

49. What may be said of his poems?

For a rude, unpoetical age, his poems are very beautiful both in thought and diction.

50. How may we sum up his character as a man, a scholar, and a writer?

As a man he was remarkable for his singular modesty, piety, and good sense; as a scholar his learning was extensive and profound; but as a writer his style is often commonplace and redundant.

LESSON VI.

ALFRED THE GREAT. DIED 901.

Works: (1) *Ten original works.*
(2) *Ten translations.*

51. What is this celebrated prince's rank in Anglo-Saxon literature?

Alfred, the greatest of the kings of England, stands pre-eminent as a writer of Anglo-Saxon prose, and is the last of the great literary names of this period.

52. For what was he remarkable in boyhood?

In boyhood he was distinguished for beauty of person, graceful manners, and early display of talent.

53. What is related of his education?

Owing to the disturbed state of the times he was twelve years of age before he was taught to read. He was a most diligent student, but did not find time during his busy career to study Latin until he was forty. He afterwards became one of the best Latin scholars of his day.

54. At what age did he ascend the throne?

He became king at the age of twenty-two, and

and you will be able to draw from them, both for yourselves and others, the secret of eternal beauty."

reigned for thirty years, the first half of which were spent in battling with the fierce and warlike Danes.

55. What characteristic did he admirably unite in one person?

In this wonderful man were united the qualities of the saint, the soldier, the scholar, and the statesman in a most eminent degree.

56. What celebrated university did he found?

The University of Oxford.

57. What great literary work did he perform for the good of his people?

Having restored peace to his kingdom, his next object was to bestow upon his people the benefits of knowledge. For this purpose he translated a number of excellent Latin works into his native Anglo-Saxon.

58. Mention the four principal works which he translated from the Latin.

(1) Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, (2) *The Pastoral of St. Gregory*,* (3) *Orosius's Roman History*, and (4) *The Consolations of Philosophy*, by Boëthius.

59. What is related of Alfred in connection with two of these works?

To each of his bishops he sent a copy of the *Pastoral of St. Gregory*, and in his bosom he always carried a copy of the *Consolations of Philosophy*, by Boëthius.

60. Was Alfred a good translator?

He was a translator of rare excellence. His literary fame rests almost entirely on his translations.

* Referring to the manner in which he translated this work, the great king says, with edifying simplicity: "Sometimes by word of mouth, and sometimes according to the sense, as I had learned it from Plegmund my Archbishop, and Asser my Bishop, and Grimbald my Mass-priest, and John my Mass-priest."

61. What can you say of his original productions?

Many of them are now lost. They were nearly all treatises on law and theology, and hence do not come within the scope of general literature.

62. What praise do critics award to his style?

His style is marked by ease, simplicity, and elegance.

63. What is said of Alfred's general scholarship?

Though he began his serious studies somewhat late in life, he was before his death, which occurred in his fifty-second year, the best poet, the ablest writer, and perhaps the most learned man in his kingdom.*

LESSON VII.

THE ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE.

64. What is the last literary monument of the Anglo-Saxon language?

The Anglo-Saxon or National Chronicle.

65. What is the Saxon Chronicle, and what period of English history does it cover?

As its name indicates,† it is a chronological arrange-

* Speaking of the Catholic Alfred the Great, Edmund Burke truly says: "One cannot help being amazed that a prince who lived in such turbulent times, who commanded personally in *fifty four* pitched battles, who had so disordered a province to regulate, who was not only a legislator but a judge, and who was continually superintending his armies, his navies, the traffic of his kingdom; his revenues, and the conduct of all his officers, could have bestowed so much of his time on religious exercises and speculative knowledge; but the exertion of all his faculties and virtues seemed to have given a mutual strength to all of them. Thus all historians speak of this prince, whose whole history was one panegyric; and whatever dark spots of human frailty may have adhered to such a character, they are all entirely hid in the splendor of his many shining qualities and grand virtues, that throw a glory over the obscure period in which he lived, and which is for no other reason worthy of our knowledge."—*Abridgment of English History*.

† By some writers it is called the *Old English Chronicle*.

ment of the most notable events in English history from the birth of our Lord to the beginning of the reign of Henry II., A.D. 1154.

66. In what language is it written?

In Anglo-Saxon prose, with an occasional attempt at alliterative verse in the same language.

67. Who originated the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle?

PLEGMUND, Archbishop of Canterbury, who continued the annals down to his own day, A.D. 891.

68. From what sources were the early portions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle taken?

From various trustworthy sources; but the early portion is, in the main, a compilation from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*.

69. During what time may the Saxon Chronicle be regarded as a register of contemporary events?

From about A.D. 950 to 1154.

70. By whom was the Chronicle continued after the death of Plegmund?

It was continued by the monks in several of the great monasteries of England.

71. How many genuine copies of this ancient and valuable historical work yet exist in manuscript?

Seven.

72. What may be said of the style in which the Chronicle is written?

The style is somewhat dry and inelegant, the pious writers aiming rather at brevity, truth, and accuracy of statement than mere beauty of diction.*

* Here are a few entries translated into English:

"A.D. 457. At this time Hengest and Aesc his son fought against the Britons at the place which is called Crayford, and there slew four thousand men. And then the Britons forsook Kent-land, and with much dismay fled to London-town."

"A.D. 690. This year Archbishop Theodore died. He was bishop

73. What is the historical value of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle?

Its historical value can scarcely be overestimated. It is the most ancient history of England, giving us, in a series of unadorned pen-pictures, nearly all the knowledge we possess of the early social life and institutions of that nation.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER II.

1. The Angles, Saxons, and other German tribes took forcible possession of the greater part of England in A.D. 450; hence the name *England*, which signifies *land of the Angles*.
2. For over a century after this event the history of England is written in blood.
3. The foundation of the Saxon Heptarchy, or *seven kingdoms*, dates from A.D. 586.
4. Egbert founded the English monarchy by uniting those small kingdoms into one, A.D. 827.
5. The Catholic Church converted and civilized all the nations in which Christianity is professed to-day. Religion came *first*, and was followed by law, refinement, and literature.
6. St. Columbkille founded the first monastery in

for twenty-two years, and he was buried at Canterbury. Berthwald succeeded to the bishopric. Before this the bishops had been Romans, but from this time they were English."

"A.D. 793. In this year dire forewarnings came over the land of the Northumbrians, and miserably terrified the people. Mighty whirlwinds and lightnings there were, and in the air were seen fiery dragons. A great famine soon followed these signs; and a little after that, in the same year, on the VI of the Ides of January, the havoc of heathen men wickedly destroyed God's church at Lindesfarne, through rapine and slaughter."
The "heathen men" were the Danes.

Scotland, and established religion, literature, and civilization in that country.

7. St. Augustine, a Benedictine monk, began the conversion of the English nation in A.D. 596. He laid the foundation of learning, literature, and civilization in England.

8. Pope Gregory the Great gave the English people their *first* library in A.D. 601.

9. In those early ages the monasteries were the *only* schools and colleges, and the monks were the *only* guardians of learning and literature.

10. The most renowned institutions of learning in Great Britain, during the Anglo-Saxon period, were the monastery of Iona in Scotland, the monasteries of Lindisfarne, Wearmouth, Yarrow, York, Whitby, Malmesbury, and Glastonbury in England, and Llan-carvan and Bangor in Wales.

11. About *eighty* British writers of note appeared between the introduction of Christianity and the Norman Conquest.

12. The chief of these were *Bede, Alcuin, Alfred the Great, Cædmon, Aldhelm, and Gildas*.

13. Bede is the most illustrious name in the literature of the Anglo-Saxon period.

14. The greatest historical production of this period is Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*.

15. The *Saxon Chronicle* is the most ancient history of England, and the *last* production written in Anglo-Saxon.*

* For a fuller account of the literature of the Anglo-Saxon Period, see *The Development of English Literature* by Brother Azarias, Vol. I.