

## REMARKS ON THE SAXON INVASION.

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THE Saxon Invasion may be regarded as by far the most important event in English History. It has given us most of the blood that flows in our veins; the greater portion of our language; and indeed all that is most characteristic. We owe to it, also, our territorial divisions, the names of places (with few exceptions), and those of the days of the week. It has likewise left deep traces in our Laws and Legislation.

Since the Saxon Invasion no foreign admixture with our nation has so deeply affected it. The Danish invaders were of a kindred race, who, bringing few or no women with them, easily amalgamated with the previously existing population. They introduced, however, certain modifications in our laws and habits, traces of which may be found in the central and eastern districts of England, and still more in the north-eastern counties and Lowlands of Scotland.

Relics of the Danish conquests may be remarked in place names which end in *By* (*dwelling* or *town*), and such names as Sneefell, High Fell, High Force; *FELL* being the Norwegian *field* or *mountain*, and *Foss* in the same language being a *waterfall*. It may here be remarked that the elevated Moorlands in Northumberland are always called the *Fells*. Indeed, beyond the Firth of Forth, the Teutonic population of Scotland must be regarded as mainly Scandinavian. That of the Orkneys and Shetland is exclusively so.

The Norman Conquest has been the most influential event in our history since the Saxon invasion. It gave us for many generations French sovereigns, and a French Aristocracy, and it modified profoundly our laws and language, without however essentially changing the life-blood

of the nation. Frenchmen came here in great numbers, but not French women. Saxon women became the mothers of a following generation, and taught their own language to their children. As there must always be a tendency in the national type to revert to that of the majority, we may still consider ourselves as being, in blood, an Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Danish people. In either case we belong to the great Teutonic race which is likely to rule the world.

And here we may remark how different were the effects produced by the Norman Conquest of Neustria, from those wrought by either the Saxon or the Norman conquests of England. Less than two hundred and fifty years elapsed from the time of Rollo to that of William the Conqueror, yet the latter and his followers had become truly Frenchmen. On their adopted country they have impressed hardly any traces of their Scandinavian origin, except a few names of places, such as *Caudebec* and *Bolbec*, whereof the last syllable in each is the Scandinavian term for a small river.

We are told that the Teutonic tribes who established themselves in Britain, in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, were Saxons, Angles, and Jutes. As the scope of my remarks will not require me to discriminate between these tribes, I shall, for convenience, speak of them all as Saxons. They all inhabited, originally, the northern and eastern shores of the North Sea, and seem to have been merely local divisions of the same people.

Their invasion of Britain assumed a palpable shape about the middle of the fifth century, soon after the cessation of the Roman dominion. It is certain, however, that the Saxons had long before been known, and dreaded, as pirates and devastators. A large tract, situated along the south-eastern and eastern shores, comprehending those of the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and Kent, was called *Saxonicum Littus*. This "Saxon Shore" was protected by a large number of fortresses, and was presided over by an officer of rank whose title was "*Comes Littoris Saxonici*"—"Count of the Saxon Shore." It by no means follows that the title "Count of the Saxon Shore" implied the existence of a district so called; still less of a province inhabited by

Saxons, but simply that part of Britain most exposed to the ravages of Saxon pirates.

And here a few words as to the Saxons anterior to their first recognized arrival in England. They are not named by Tacitus in his account of Germany, but they are mentioned by Ptolemy at the close of the second century. In order to explain the general prevalence of the Saxons in England, so soon after their first recorded invasion, and also the possible existence of a Saxon province, it has been supposed by some, and among them by the learned German Lappenburg, that a settlement of Saxons in England had taken place in Roman times. We are told that 200,000 Vandals, a Teutonic tribe, had been transported to Britain in the reign of the Emperor Probus. On the other hand it must be remarked, that the desolation of the country previously to its formal abandonment by the Roman Empire is ascribed to the Picts and Scots, who were Celts, not Teutons. I think that it may be assumed as most probable that there were no Saxons in England before the middle of the fifth century except casual settlers and slaves.

There are passages in Ammianus Marcellinus, a writer who died after A.D. 390, bearing on this subject.

From the 8th chapter of his 27th book, it appears that A.D. 368 an expedition, commanded by Theodosius, was sent into Britain which was completely successful. It defeated and expelled the Barbarians; and we may, I think, suppose that the Saxons played a part in this war; although the Celtic tribes, seated beyond the Tyne, were the most formidable of the invaders.

The Picti (divided into the two tribes of Dicaledones and Vetturiones) and the Scotti are mentioned as having laid waste Britain, while the Saxons and Franks were plundering Gaul. Ammianus, after saying that the Scotti had ravaged Britain, adds, "*Gallicanos vero Tractus Franci et Saxones visdem confines quo quisque erumpere potuit terrâ vel mari prædis acerbis incendiisque et captivorum funeribus hominum violabant.*" The Saxons and Franks penetrated the Gaulish districts, to which they adjoined, wherever they could find an opening, by sea or land, and wasted them by plundering and

burning and the murder of captives. The whole passage is appended to this paper as a note, at the end.

In the 2nd chapter of the 28th book he says, after mentioning the ravages from which the empire was suffering, A.D. 369, "*Quam ob causam præ ceteris hostibus Saxones timentur ut repentini,*" "on which account the Saxons as sudden invaders are feared above other enemies." This would seem to exclude any notion of permanent settlement. Here however it may be remarked that Britain is not alluded to as the province attacked. It may have been Gaul.

In the 7th chapter of the 30th book, Ammianus mentions the Saxons as having invaded Britain, and been expelled during the year 375. Here again we see no reason to imagine that they had effected any permanent settlements.

In none of the above passages can I detect any evidence that Saxons had settled in England, at any rate before the fifth century. Now it must be here remarked that the Saxons had hardly any literature anterior to Bede, that great man who does such honour to our race, and who died not a very old man, early in the eighth century. They are supposed, indeed, to have possessed letters called Runes, about which comparatively little is known. Runic inscriptions appear to be less commonly found in England than in Denmark and Scandinavia. So far as I know, those which have been found are chiefly sepulchral and of small historic interest.

A few lives of English or continental saints contain passages which throw a flickering light on contemporary persons and things.

The arrival of St. Augustine about 590, and the subsequent spread of Christianity, throw a more vivid light on the condition of our country. From that time, with the aid of tradition, we may be reasonably sure as to the main events occurring during the Heptarchy, and as to the names and succession of the kings by whom its several states were governed.

It is somewhat remarkable that while Spain and Gaul were thoroughly Romanised; generally adopted the language of their conquerors; were studded with splendid cities, and produced many men distinguished in the career of literature,

nothing similar appears to have happened in Britain. It is certain that no native of Britain, under the Roman domination, rose to eminence as an author. The earliest we hear of, connected with our island, is Gildas, who lived and wrote after the Romans had abandoned it, but he was not a man to be proud of. It may, I think, then be assumed as certain that the first prominent appearance of the Saxons in English history may be fixed for the middle of the fifth century. Before that time the barbarian invaders of Britain were the Picts and Scots, who entered it from the north, from beyond the "Wall." The Saxons had been known previously as pirates but not as settlers. In so far the common tradition may be considered as truthful. It is not so, however, with the facts in which this tradition has ordinarily been clothed. The names of Hengist and Horsa can hardly be deemed historic. They are said, like Romulus and Remus, to have been brothers, but their names, both meaning "horse" in certain Low German dialects, could hardly have co-existed in the same family. These names might have had reference to the symbolic horse, so well known among the tribes of Northern Germany, and still retained in the armorial bearings of our county. It is impossible to fix upon the time when the vaguest reports respecting the Saxon invasion were gathered into a more connected body of tradition, and that again into history more or less authentic. We may approximately fix the period between the middle of the fifth and the middle of the sixth century, for the first category; and that between the middle of the sixth and the early part of the seventh century for the second. With the *Saxon Chronicle*, and the works of Bede, we soon after glide into the light of day, as respects the most important facts of our annals.

It may be impossible to follow out, in detail, the various events which occurred in our island during the early part of what we call the Heptarchy, but which in truth was an Octarchy, and probably indeed comprehended at one time more principalities than eight. We may, however, sketch out, with a very reasonable degree of probability, the great facts which characterized the Saxon invasion.

Consider the condition of England after the year 800.

We know that the population of the whole of southern Britain, excepting Wales, Cornwall, Cumberland and Westmoreland, was Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Danish. The whole population had embraced Christianity, and was governed by laws, many of which have been preserved to our days. In the various monastic establishments Latin literature was cultivated, and there was also a vernacular literature comprehending annals and poetry.

If now we knew exactly what was the condition of Roman Britain, more especially its condition when the western Emperors abandoned it, we should know exactly the changes that had occurred between the middle of the fifth century and the conclusion of the Heptarchal government. But of Roman Britain our knowledge is most imperfect. Let us however form to ourselves as correct a picture as the means in our power permit us to obtain.

When Britain first became known to the Romans it was inhabited by many tribes of a purely Celtic character, but by at least one tribe, the *Belgæ*, who are supposed to have contained a mixture of Teutonic blood. They had emigrated, not long before, from Gaul and Belgium, where kindred tribes were to be found. It does not seem however that the Belgæ could be considered as other than Celts, slightly modified by German influence. The invasion of Julius Cæsar produced no permanent influence on Britain; but in the reign of Claudius, which began A.D. 43, a serious attempt at conquest was made, and in that of Domitian about A.D. 79, Agricola, the father-in-law of the historian Tacitus, appears to have completed the conquest of the country as far as the Grampians. By his directions a Roman fleet circumnavigated the island and discovered, or at any rate revisited, the Orkneys and Hebrides.

The northern frontier of the Roman province frequently varied, but on the whole it receded, first to the line between the Firths of Forth and Clyde, and ultimately to the valley of the Tyne and the Solway Firth, which was defended by a wall strengthened at short intervals by a system of forts. It seems remarkable that a few half-naked barbarians, for

such the inhabitants of Northern Scotland—then called Caledonians—must have been, could arrest the flight of the Roman Eagles. It was not from simple contempt nor from the absence of an effort to subdue them. The Emperor Severus (A.D. 208), a general and a statesman, led a mighty host against them, and was compelled to retreat, after losing a great part of his army, which perished, not from the sword of the enemy, but from famine and disease. A country almost uncultivated, roadless, composed of mountains, forests and marshes, and inhabited by a brave though rude people, defied all the efforts of Roman power. About one thousand years afterwards the attempts of our Edwards were baffled by similar causes. It may perhaps however be more correct to say, that in the second century of our era, the conquering impulses of Rome had ceased to exist. The Emperors strove to protect the provinces they already possessed, rather than to add to their dominions; especially was this their policy when additional conquests could add nothing to their revenues, but might act as a drain upon their exchequer, and demand an increase in their military establishments.

South-Britain, however, was traversed in all directions by roads, furnished with post stations. A number of cities, and of considerable towns, studded the face of the country, and possessed splendid temples, theatres, and other indications of wealth and civilization. These cities contained a large Latin-speaking population, and were the seats of an extensive commerce. The legislation was Roman, and an army, in early times of three legions or nearly 40,000 men, occupied the fortresses and camps, scattered over the face of the land. In later times the military force was diminished. In the fourth century it consisted of only 20,000 men.

These troops, originally all foreigners, remaining as they did for many years at the same stations, must have degenerated into an unwarlike militia, and hence one cause of the feeble resistance which they opposed to the inroads of the barbarians.

Roman civilization however was not confined to the

towns and cities. Scattered over the country were extensive mansions, with fine rooms, fountains, baths, and tessellated pavements, of which remains are found in many parts of England. These imply the existence of a class of wealthy proprietors possessed of taste and refinement.

We know little about the original religion of the Britons, the stories told us of Druids and their rites being in a high degree apocryphal. Whatever it may have been, the Romans either modified, or replaced it, by the introduction of their own mythology. Temples erected for the worship of Jupiter, Diana, and other deities existed in the British cities.

There can be no doubt that Christianity in its steady progress over the Roman world found its way to our shores. We know little as to its influence over the population at large, but at any rate British Bishops are named as attendants at councils held in Gaul.

One remarkable effect of the Roman government, in the provinces, was the utter extinction of the military spirit, and of any sentiment of patriotism among the mass of the population. The system of rule was deadening and oppressive, the financial exactions most severe, and the general result of these causes is to be found in the fact that the barbarians after the defeat or collapse of the imperial armies, although few in number, were allowed to lay waste and finally to establish themselves in Gaul, Spain, and Italy, without any serious attempt on the part of the provincials to resist them. In fact it would seem that any change was regarded by them as likely to be for the better.

The little we know as to the state of our country at the downfall of the Roman dominion evinces, at least, that all military feeling had ceased to exist among the population. What precedes will enable us to form an idea, sufficiently clear, however imperfect, of the state of Britain in the middle of the fifth century.

There was a considerable Latin-speaking population in the towns, but even in them it is probable that British was the ordinary language, and that this language in some of its dialects was generally that of the people, and particularly in the rural districts. Had Latin more generally prevailed,



we should find more traces of it in the Welsh and Cornish. The former of these is a living descendant of the British of Roman times, while the latter has only expired within the last two centuries. The state of civilization, in Roman Britain, was probably inferior to that which existed in the neighbouring countries, on the continent, as has been already observed. The latter produced many distinguished writers, whose names, and in some cases their works, have descended to modern times. Not even the name of any Roman Briton of literary celebrity has survived, if any such ever existed.

Now let us compare the above picture with what we know to have existed after the establishment of the Saxons on our soil. Almost all territorial divisions and their names had been changed. The ancient religions, both idolatrous and Christian, were replaced by the Odinic mythology. We find new laws, new languages, in short every thing new. What does this altered state of things evince? First, that the Saxon invasion was marked by ravages and massacres of the most horrible character. The old inhabitants, speaking generally, were either slaughtered, reduced to slavery, or driven into flight. All property belonging to them was seized by the invader. The cities, towns, and scattered dwellings in rural districts were laid waste, being generally destroyed by fire, of which traces are almost universally found in their remains. Some of the cities thus destroyed, such as *Uriconium*, now Wroxeter, *Cavella*, now Silchester, and *Anderida*, Pevensey, have never been rebuilt. Others, usually marked by names ending in "Chester" or "Eter," still exist, or like "Sarum" have been replaced by towns growing up in their immediate vicinity. Secondly, the Saxon invasion ought to be regarded as an immigration. The invaders must have brought many women with them. Had they depended for wives on native women, the children would have adopted the language of their mothers and nurses, and the Anglo-Saxon language, if retained, would have contained a large proportion of British or Latin words, which does not appear to be the case. It is this circumstance, the complete adoption of a pure Teutonic language in England, which has induced some writers

to imagine that a Saxon population existed in some parts, previously to the cessation of the Roman dominion. Of this however no historic proof exists; indeed it could only be imagined as respects a certain portion of the Eastern coast, the *Saxonicum Littus*; but the almost complete disappearance of Celtic names and the creation of new territorial divisions is almost equally conspicuous in central England, and indeed up to the Welsh frontier. There the native race at length made a stand, and established a frontier, which they have maintained with invincible tenacity for thirteen or fourteen centuries, and which they still maintain. It is not here assumed that not a single Anglo-Briton remained in districts occupied by the Saxons. Their continued existence is mentioned indeed in Anglo-Saxon documents, but they could hardly have been numerous anywhere, and their condition was probably miserable, that of mere slaves, or at any rate serfs.

The facts of the long struggle between Saxon and Celt are almost unknown to us, until towards the end of the sixth century. We hear of the exploits of Aurelius Ambrosius, and of Arthur. These, especially the latter, were probably historic personages, but the events connected with their names have not been handed down by writers who lived in or near their times; and it is difficult to assign a distinct value to the traditions which relate to them.

It may be interesting to notice the essential difference, in character, between the behaviour of the Saxons and Angles in England, and of their continental brethren who seized upon Gaul, Spain, and Italy. These conquerors were:—in Gaul, the various tribes of Franks, the Burgundians, and Visigoths; in Spain, the Visigoths, Vandals, Alans, and Suevi; in Italy, the Ostrogoths, and subsequently the Lombards.

The inhabitants of those countries, as a rule, seem to have made but a trifling resistance to the barbarians. The Imperial Roman government had collapsed. The urban population was ground down by a severe and ill-managed taxation. The rural population was mostly in a condition next to that of slavery. All seem to have felt that any

change from their actual condition could hardly be for the worse. At any rate, their resistance, if they did resist, was of the feeblest character.

But what was the conduct of the invaders? They seemed to have seized as a rule one-third of the land, leaving two-thirds to the old inhabitants, whom they otherwise left in possession of civil rights. They enacted codes of law, founded mainly on their own customs and notions of right, some of which, however, borrowed largely from Roman law. The Roman law they recognized as applicable to the old inhabitants in all disputes between themselves; while the barbarian codes, on the other hand, regulated all disputes among barbarians. The municipal administration of the towns was left to a great extent undisturbed, and formed the germ of the institutions which we find prevailing in the urban communities of the middle ages.

The moral and political aspect presented by Gaul and Spain, after their occupation by the invaders, must have been very singular. There were two or more nations in the same country, governed by different laws, and for some time speaking different languages. After a few generations a fusion took place; new nations and new languages were called into being. The distinction between Frank and Roman ceased to exist, and by the beginning of the ninth century we meet with public documents composed in a tongue of which, as might be expected, Latin composes by far the greater part. Hence arose in France those two dialects which are called the languages *d'Oil* and *d'Oc*. In the Spanish peninsula, and in Italy, similar courses, modified by various circumstances, led to the creation of the Romance tongues, now spoken in those countries.

The complete change that had taken place in the relations of Britain to the more civilized portions of Europe are curiously illustrated by the ignorance respecting it, evinced by the historian Procopius, who flourished about the middle of the sixth century, and by the wonder of Pope Gregory at the sight of the Saxons exposed in the slave market at Rome, which led to the mission of St. Augustine.

It may here be remarked that essential differences existed between the previous condition of the Saxon invaders of Britain, and that of their brethren on the continent. The former had not been exposed to any civilizing influences. They were rude unlettered pagan barbarians. The latter had for the most part dwelt side by side with the Roman provincials. They had long furnished large contingents to the Imperial army, and to some extent Christianity, with its humanizing tendencies, prevailed among them.

The task which I had proposed to myself is completed. I might indeed expose to a critical examination the narrations of Geoffrey of Monmouth, the various historical hints to be gathered from the works of the Welsh bards, as to the long conflict between Britons and Saxons, which ended in the expulsion of the former from all the territories once held by them with the exception of Wales, Cumbria, and Cornwall; finally the earlier part of the productions of Bede and Nennius or Asser, or the Saxon Chronicle. That these latter works may be considered as containing authentic history after the introduction of Christianity, say from about the year 600, I cannot doubt, nor that fairly credible tradition may reach some years higher up the stream of time.

It has however been rather my object simply to point out, upon evidence even now before our eyes, what was the real character of the successive invasions, which, carried on for perhaps two centuries from the middle of the fifth to the middle of the seventh century, have had such overpowering influences, in making ourselves and our country what we now are. It is rather remarkable that the English people should pride themselves upon being Anglo-Saxons, for certain it is that little credit can be claimed from such a descent. The Anglo-Saxons produced but two really great men, Bede and Alfred. They never reached even a moderate degree of culture, and they were conquered by the Danes and Normans, the only foreign foes who seriously attacked them.

I have already remarked, and now repeat, that these invasions ought to be considered as emigrations. The Saxons taking their wives with them left their own territories, and seized upon new seats beyond the sea. These they succeeded

in occupying, after slaying or driving away the greater part of the former inhabitants, and reducing the remnant to a state of slavery.

Since the above paper was written, a discovery has been made strongly confirmatory of the writer's views as to the character of the Saxon conquests and immigration. In one of the limestone caves of Yorkshire, above a deposit containing flint weapons, the relics of a pre-historic age, were those of a Romano-Celtic people, personal ornaments, coins, pottery, etc. It is not in the least probable that cave-dwellers could have existed in England during the period of Roman domination, and we may fairly regard these relics as marking a time when the miserable fugitives from either Saxon or Danish invaders had been driven from their homes, and sought, with how much success we know not, to save their lives, nearly all that remained to them.

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NOTE.

Profectus itaque ab Ambianis, Treverosque festinans, nuntio percellit gravi, qui Britannias indicabat barbaricâ conspiratione ad ultimam vexatas inopiam; Nectaridumque Comitem maritimi tractus occisum et Fullofaudem Ducem hostium insidiis circumventum. Quibus magno cum horrore compertis, Severum etiam tum Domesticorum Comitem misit, si Fors casum dedisset optatum correcturum sequiûs gesta: quo paullo postea revocato, Jovinus eadem loca profectus, Provertuidem celeri gradu præmisit, adminicula petiturus exercitus validi. Id enim instantes necessitates flagitare firmabant. Postremò ob multa et metuenda, quæ super eadem insula rumores assidui perferebant, electus Theodosius illuc properare disponitur, officii martiis felicissimè cognitus; adscitâque animosâ legionum et cohortium pube, ire tendebat præeunte fiducia speciosa. Et quoniam cum Constantis Principis actus componerem, motus adolescentis, et senescentis Oceani, situmque Britannia pro captu virium explanavi, ad ea quæ digesta sunt semel, revolvi superfluum duxi; ut Ulyxes Homericus apud Phœacas ob difficultatem nimiam replicare formidat. Illud tamen sufficiei dici quod eo tempore Picti in duas gentes divisi, Dicalidonas et Vecturiones itidemque Attacotti bellicosa hominum natio et Scotti, per diversa vagantes multa populabantur: Gallicanos verò tractus Franci et Saxones iisdem confines, quo quisque erumpere potuit terrâ vel mari, prædis acerbis, incendiisque, et captivorum funeribus hominum violabant. Adhæc prohibenda si copiam dedisset fortuna prosperior, orbis extrema Dux efficacissimus perfens cum venisset ad Bononia litus, quod a spatio

controverso terrarum angustiis reciproci distinguitur maris, attolli horrendis aestibus adsueti, rursusque, sine ullâ navigantium noxa speciem camplanari camporum exinde transmeato lentius freto defertur Rutupias stationem ex adverso tranquillam. Unde cum consecuti Batavi venissent et Eruli, Joviique et victores, fidentes viribus numeri: egressus tendensque ad Lundinium vetus oppidum, quod Augustam posteritas appellavit, divisis plurifariam globis, adortus est vagantes hostium vastatorias manus, graves onere sarcinarum: et properè fuis qui vinctos homines agebant et pecora prædam excussit, quam tributarii perdidere miserrimi. His denique restituta omni, præter partem exiguam impensam militibus fessis, mersam difficultatibus suis antehac civitatem, sed subito quam salus sperari potuit recreatam, in ovantis speciem lætissimus introiit. Ubi ad audenda majora prospero successu elatus, tutâque scrutando consilia, futuri morabatur ambiguus, diffusam variarum gentium plebem et ferocientem immaniter, non nisi per dolos occultiores et improvisos excursus superari posse, captivorum confessionibus et transfugarum indicibus doctus, Denique edictis propositis impunitateque promissa, desertores ad procinctum vocabat, et multos alios per diversa libero comœatu dispersos. Quo monitu ut redire plerique, incentivo percitus, retentusque anxiiis curis, Civilem nomine rectorum Britannias pro Præfectis ad se poposcerat mitti, virum acrioris ingenii, sed justis tenacem et recti: itidemque Dulcitiu, Ducem scientiâ rei militaris insignem.—*Ammianus Marcellinus*, Book xxvii., Cap. 8.