

THE  
 HISTORY  
 OF THE  
 ANGLO-SAXONS.

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BOOK I.

CHAP. I.

*The Origin of the Saxons.*

THE Anglo-Saxons were the people who, CHAP.  
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 in different divisions, transported themselves from the Cimbric peninsula and its vicinity into England. They were branches of the great Saxon confederation, which from the Elbe extended itself at last to the Rhine. The hostilities of this formidable people made the western regions of Europe tremble at their name; and when Rome, the usurping empress of the world, admitted the barbaric myriads to partition her most valuable provinces, the Anglo-Saxons seized Britain as their spoil, in the commencement of

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its troubled independance. The ancient inhabitants, and the progeny of the Roman settlers, disappeared as they advanced, or accepted their yoke, and Saxon laws, Saxon language, Saxons manners, government, and barbarism, overspread the land.

This mighty revolution, than which history presents to us none more complete, has made the fortunes of the Saxons during every period interesting and instructive to us. Though other invaders have shaded the island with the banners of conquest, yet the effects of the Anglo-Saxon settlements have prevailed beyond every other. Our language, our government, and our laws, display our Cimbric ancestors in every part: they live not merely in our annals and traditions, but in our civil institutions and perpetual discourse. The parent tree is indeed greatly amplified by branches engrafted on it from other regions, and by the new shoots, which the accidents of time, and the improvements of society, have produced; but it discovers yet its Saxon origin, and retains its Saxon properties, though more than thirteen centuries have rolled over, with all their tempests and vicissitudes.

The present composition aspires to relate the history of this celebrated nation, with whose antiquities

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quities our present state is so essentially connected. The first division of their transactions will comprize their continental history previous to their emigration. The second will narrate their establishments in Britain, and the incidents which followed, up to the æra of the Norman conquest.

Although the Saxon name became the appellation of a great confederacy of nations, yet at first it denoted a single state. The Romans began to remark it during the second century of the christian æra: until that period it had escaped the notice of the conquerors of the world, and the happy obscurity was rewarded by the absence of that desolation, which the ambition of the great republic poured profusely on mankind.

Ptolemy the Alexandrian was the first writer whom we know to have mentioned the Saxons. By the passage in his geography, and by the concurrence of all their future history, it is ascertained, that before the year 141 after Christ<sup>1</sup>, there was a people called Saxones, who inhabited

<sup>1</sup> Ptolemy lived in the reign of Marcus Aurelius according to Suidas, vol. ii. p. 646. Em. P. 3; but he testifies himself in the 7th book Mag. Synt. p. 167, that he made astronomical observations at Alexandria in the 2d year of Ant. Pius, or ann. Christ. 139. 3 Feb. Bibl. Græc. 412. He speaks also of an eclipse of the moon in the 9th of Adrian, or ann. Chr. 125. De la Lande's Astron. i. p. 312. He mentions no observation beyond 141. Ib. 117.

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a territory on the north side of the Elbe, on the neck of the Cimbric Chersonesus <sup>2</sup>, and three small islands at the mouth of this river. From the same author it is also clear, that the Saxones were of no great importance at this period, for in this peninsula, which is now divided into Jutland, Sleswick, and Holstein, no fewer than six other nations are stationed, besides the Saxones and the remnant of the Cimbri <sup>3</sup>.

But it is not probable that the Saxons should have started suddenly into existence in the days of Ptolemy. The question of their previous history has been therefore much agitated, and an equal quantity of learning and of absurdity has been brought forward upon the subject.

It has been observed, that to explain the origin of the Saxons, the most wild and inconsistent fictions have been framed <sup>4</sup>. But it is not  
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<sup>2</sup> To suit his peculiar system, Rudbeck transports both the Saxons and the Chersonesus itself into Scandinavia. Spener's Notit. Germ. Ant. p. 374; but the power of this magician was of small duration. The people and their territory were soon carried back.

<sup>3</sup> Cl. Ptolemæus Geog. l. ii. c. 11. Pontanus comments upon it. Chorog. Daniæ, p. 648. Marcianus of Heraclea, somewhat later than Ptolemy, gives the Saxons the same position on the neck of the Chersonesus. Pont. ib. 651. The geographical Lexicographer of Byzantium, usually named Stephanus, briefly says, "dwelling in the Cimbric Chersonesus." Stæph. Byz. voc. Saxones.

<sup>4</sup> Krantz remarked this: "Ita puerilibus fabulis et anilibus deliramentis

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this nation only which has been thus distinguished by the perverseness of the human mind labouring to explore inscrutable antiquity : every people may recount similar puerilities.

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To claim an extravagant duration has been the folly of every state which has risen to any eminence. We have heard in our childhood of the dreams of the Babylonians, Egyptians, Indians, and Chinese; and we know that even Athenians could wear a golden grasshopper<sup>s</sup> as an emblem that they sprung fortuitously from the earth they cultivated in ages far beyond the reach of human history; we may therefore pardon the fables of the Saxon patriots.

It was impossible to connect the transactions of their countrymen with the Roman world, because the silence of earlier authors was decisive to prove, that until the middle of the second century they were unknown to the civilized world; but to weave out of pretended domestic traditions a history rising many ages above the Egyptian geographer, was an easier and more specious fraud. It would controvert no accredited

*liramentis omnia scotent, ut nihil in his sibi constet, nihil quadret.* Saxonia, p. 1. Yet the absurdity of others did not preserve him from an imitation.

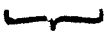
<sup>s</sup> Potter's *Antiq. of Greece*, v. i. p. 2. So the Arcadians boasted they were *προσελθουσι*, or before the moon. *Ib.* p. 1.

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narration, and national vanity willingly permits the want of positive evidence. Hence the Saxons have a history to produce, which in antiquity may satisfy the most extravagant genealogist; but, as most unfortunately for the safety of our ancestry, antiquaries are always as eager to deftroy each other as to exalt the honour of their common nation, there is nothing but a mass of contradictions to be related, which will make the sceptical world incredulous as to all.

That luxury and refinement should, amongst other vices, generate pride, would be no novelty in human experience; but that the rude sons of nature, scarcely emerged from their forests and their dens, should be familiar to this passion, is a circumstance less expected by our reason. The Saxons are but one part of the European states, who have coveted a duration almost coeval with creation. To have appeared on the world but so recently as the second century of our æra was a national disgrace, and to cleanse the intolerable stain, a succession of ancestors from the very deluge itself has been ostentatiously recorded in contemptuous emulation of the rest of mankind. The exact parent is not indeed determined, because the taste of our heralds has disagreed. Some have preferred Magog<sup>6</sup>, the grandson

Wern. Rolevinck de Westphal. ant. Situ, p. 13, &c.

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grandson of Noah ; many his grandson Gomer <sup>7</sup>; and others have been most partial to his great grandson *Askenaz* <sup>8</sup>. With more ardent patriotism some have ascended a little higher, in order to assert an origin which could not be surpassed. Hence Shem <sup>9</sup>, the eldest of Noah's offspring, and Japhet <sup>10</sup>, the youngest, have been variously selected. But as the human mind delights in contradiction, the antediluvian sons of the antediluvian patriarch, however unexceptionable for their antiquity, have not been honoured with an unanimous choice. It is the privilege immemorially assumed by an antiquary to exhibit his learning, and to indulge his caprice. Some of our annalists have felt this impulse, and the claims of Shem and Japhet have in their minds been superseded by the merits of

<sup>7</sup> Langhorn, who, to begin *ab ovo*, opens his Elenchus with an account of Adam and Eve, settles Gomer in Bactriana at first ; but conveys him afterwards to Scythia Sacana, from which his posterity, spreading through Scythia intra Imaum, became divided into the Sasones and other tribes. Antiquit. Albion. xi. 326.

<sup>8</sup> This derivation is among those mentioned by Krantz, p. 4 ; but Lazius de Gent. al. Migrat. p. 19, makes the *Askenazians* the people who were ejected by the Trojan Saxons.

<sup>9</sup> After Menev. p. 4, leads the pedigree of Alfred up to Shem, and to Adam. So others.

<sup>10</sup> Hist. Erphest. de 1 Rer. Germ. Pistori, 908. and others.

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their brother Strefius<sup>11</sup>. It is true that this Strefius is a venerable person, with whom Moses was unacquainted; but our more learned countrymen have discovered that he was born in the floating ark. We must excel each other in the length of our national as well as individual genealogy, or our spirit of competition will not be gratified, nor our envy appeased.

When the Saxon pedigree had been sufficiently guarded, a brilliant history was yet wanting to their glory. Some friendly pens have supplied this defect. The defenders of Troy are immortal amongst mankind, and the erudition of some have perceived that the Saxons marched with the battalions of Priam<sup>12</sup>. But to be the children of vanquished fugitives was less palatable to others, and a destiny more glorious has been claimed for those whose posterity have filled Germany and Britain with their colonies. The triumphant Alexander was the general alone wor-

<sup>11</sup> William Malmesbury, 41. Strefius filius Noë. Sim. Dun. adds, in archa natus. Præt. x Script. Twyfid. Langhorn Ant. Alb. 334, saw one MSS. genealogy, which derives Strefius from Japhet. The Lanfedgatal, an Icelandic composition, interposes several generations between Strefius, when it names Selkef and Noah. 1 Langb. Scrip. Dan. p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Trithemius, in the name of Wasthald de Orig. Franc. p. 3, 64. exhibits the Saxons as a progeny of Trojans. Lazius also makes them part "of the fatal relics of the Trojan war," de Gent. Migrat. 194



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thy to have led the ancient Saxons to the field of martial honour: they followed him to the stream of victory, and on his death, to elude the envy excited by their exploits, they exchanged the slothful plains of the East for the hardier foil of the Germanic continent. The Thuringians did not receive the heroes with the confidence they exacted, but fraud and violence soon extorted a country <sup>13</sup>.

In the sixteenth century these details were found to be warranted by no evidence, and fell into discredit; but the glory of the Saxons possessed a vivaciousness which survived destruction, and sprang up like Antæus with new vigour from its misfortune. They were admitted to be neither Trojans nor Macedonians; they were Germans, indigenous Germans <sup>14</sup>, polluted by no fo-

<sup>13</sup> This derivation was at one time the most popular. It is found in Wittichind Gest. Sax. p. 2, and was firmly believed by Gotfred. Viterb. 2 Pift. 361.

Saxo, velut credo, patria fuit ante Macedo,  
 Regis Alexandri miles ubique fuit.

The authors who have adopted this idea are very numerous. It is one of the facts on which the celebrated Agrippa founds his Philippic against History. De Van. Scient. p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Many continental writers affirm this. Among these is Bebelius, a man of merit; but whose learning and eloquence were too partially pressed into the service of his patriotism. He discovers his ancient Germans not only to have been valiant, but perpetually victorious; not only to have possessed mind, strength, beauty, and integrity, but superior mind, strength, beauty, and an integrity unparalleled in the world. See his tract in 1 Schard. Hist. Germ. 256—286.

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reign race, and they were flourishing in arms and commerce above a thousand years before the christian æra. What claim of vanity could be bolder than this? They were active on the Elbe, the Weser, and the Ems<sup>15</sup>, before, perhaps, these rivers had been at all disturbed by any human oars!

The effect of evidence on the mind is as various as the perceptions and affociations of individuals. The authorities which were decisive in the estimation of one scholar, were light as chaff in the judgment of another. When once the origin of the Saxons was submitted to investigation, conjecture began to unfold its plumes, and soared in devious flights through the dark expanse of historical erudition.

No principle of judgment governed its exertions: men were only solicitous to be singular; and if the opinion were but novel, its extravagance was overlooked. Hence the Cimbri<sup>16</sup>, the

<sup>15</sup> Krantz (*Saxonia*, p. 5.) was betrayed into this mistake by accrediting the reveries of Saxo Grammaticus, of which Chrytæus says truly, “*pœtica magis quam historica fide scripta temporum etiam, ut tota ipsius historia, distinctione accurate carent.*” *Saxonia Proemium.*

<sup>16</sup> Aventinus *Ann. Boiorum*, p. 383, and Sheringham *de Orig. Angl.* 45, one of the most learned and intelligent of our antiquaries.

Chauci,