

THE
HISTORY
OF THE
ANGLO-SAXONS.

Of the Saxons in their Pagan State.

CHAP. I.

The Character and Persons of the most ancient Saxons.

THE civil and military history of the Anglo-Saxons having been detailed, it is proposed to complete the original undertaking by presenting, in this volume, as correct a picture of their manners, government, laws, literature, religion, and language, as the imperfect documents which remain will enable us to compose. If some of the features must be still left in obscurity, let it be recollected that nearly eight hundred years have passed away since the period at which this history terminates.

Vol. IV. B No

B O O K ^{I.} No part of the Anglo-Saxon æra was very luminous in its literature; and our narrative must be deficient where our materials are scanty. Nothing therefore must be expected by the public but that the details which are given be authentic, and that fancy be not suffered to let loose her phantoms in those places which time has surrendered to irremovable oblivion.

THE Anglo-Saxons came to England from the Germanic continent; and above a century had elapsed from their first settlements before they received those improvements and changes which followed the introduction of the Christian system. These circumstances will make it advisable to exhibit them as they were in their continental and pagan state, before they are delineated with the features and in the dress of Christianity.

It would be extremely desirable to give a complete portrait of our ancestors in their uncivilized state, because this is an epocha in the history of the human mind which has seldom been faithfully detailed or sufficiently considered. But our curiosity must submit to disappointment on this subject. The converted Anglo-Saxon remembered the practices of his idolatrous ancestors with too much abhorrence to record them for the notice of future ages; and as we have no runic spells to call the pagan warrior from his grave, we can only see him in those imperfect sketches which patient industry may collect from the passages that are scattered in the works which time has spared.

THE character of the ancient Saxons displayed the qualities of fearless, active, and successful pirates.

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rates. It is not merely a Spanish churchman¹ who C H A P.
1. remarks them as dreadful for their courage and agility, but the literary emperor, who had lived among barbarians, and who had fought with some Saxon tribes, denotes them as distinguished amongst their neighbours for vehemence and valour². The pagan historian, their contemporary, expresses the general feeling of his age when he ranks them as superior to others in energy, strength, and warlike fortitude³.

THEIR ferocious qualities were nourished by the habitual employment of indiscriminate depredation. It was from the cruelty and destructiveness, as well as from the suddenness of their incursions, that they were dreaded more than any other people. Like the Danes and Norwegians, their successors and assailants, they desolated where they plundered with the sword and flame⁴.

It was consistency in such men to have been inattentive to danger. They launched their predatory vessels, and suffered the wind to blow them to any foreign coast, indifferent whether the result was a depredation unresisted, or the deathful conflict. Such was their cupidity, or their brutal

¹ Orosius, lib. vii. c. 32.

² Julian Imp. Orat. de laud. Const. p. 116.

³ Zozimus, lib. iii. p. 147 ed. Ox.

⁴ Salvian says, gens Saxonum fera est, de Gub. Dei, lib. iv. V. Fortunatus calls them "aspera gens, vivens quasi more ferino," 8 Mag. Bib. 787; and Sidonius has the strong expression of "omni hosti truculentior," lib. viii. c. 7. Even in the eighth century the Saxons on the continent are described by Eginhard as "natura feroces," p. 4.

⁵ Amm. Marcell. lib. xxviii. c. 3.

BOOK
 I. hardihood, that they often preferred embarking in the tempest which might shipwreck them, because at such a season their victims would be more unguarded. Their warfare did not originate from the more generous, or the more pardonable of man's evil passions. It was the offspring of the basest. Their swords were not unsheathed by ambition or revenge. The love of plunder and of cruelty was their favourite habit, and hence they attacked, indifferently, every coast which they could reach ⁶.

As their naval expeditions, though often wildly daring, were much governed by the policy of surprise, so their land incursions were sometimes conducted with all the craft of robbers. "Dispersed into many bodies," says Zozimus of one of their confederates, "they plundered by night, and when day appeared they concealed themselves in the woods, feasting on the booty they had gained ⁷." They are, however, seldom mentioned by the historians of the fourth and fifth centuries without some epithets which express a superiority over other men in their achievements or their courage.

THE ferocity of the Saxon character would seem to suit better the dark and melancholy physiognomies of Asia and Africa than the fair, pleasing, and blue-eyed countenances by which our ancestors are

⁶ Amm. Marcell. lib. xxviii. c. 3. xxvii. c. 8. Sid. Apoll. quoted at length in the first volume of this history, p. 75.

⁷ Zozimus, lib. iii. p. 149. This tribe whom he calls Quadi, Marcellinus, lib. xvii. c. 8, more correctly names Chamavi. These robbers were destroyed by one Chariette, a Franc, who organized some corps on the same plan.

described.

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described⁸. But though nature had supplied them with the germs of those amiable qualities which have become the national character of their descendants, their direful customs, their acquired passions, and barbarous education perverted every good propensity. So ductile is the human capacity, that there is no colour, climate, or constitution, which governs the moral character so permanently as the good or evil habits and discipline to which it is subjected.

C H A P.
1.

THEIR persons were of the largest size⁹. On the continent they were so proud of their forms and their descent, and so anxious to perpetuate them, that they were averse to marriages with other nations¹⁰. Hence the colour of the hair of their males is mentioned as uniform. In the fourth century they had a peculiar method of arranging and cutting their hair, which Sidonius has described. It had the effect of enlarging the appearance of the face, and diminishing the head¹¹. In the following ages it is

⁸ Sidon. Appol. lib. viii. ep. 9. Bede, lib. ii. c. 1. The expressions applied by Tacitus to all the German nations are, "truces, et cerulei oculi."

⁹ Meginhard in Langbaine, Scrip. Dan. tom. ii. p. 39. Wittichind, p. 5.

¹⁰ Meginh. ib. Tacitus had expressed the same of all the German tribes.

¹¹ Cujus vertex extimas per oras
 Non contenta suos tenere morsus
 Arctat lamina marginem comarum
 Et sic crinibus ad cutem recisis
 Decrescit caput, additurque vultus.

Sid. Ap.
mentioned.

BOOK mentioned as diffused upon their shoulders¹²; and
 I. an ancient Saxon law punished the man who seized another by the hair¹³.

IN their dress their loose linen vests were adorned with trimming, woven in different colours¹⁴. Their external garment was the sagum, or cloak¹⁵, and they had shoes. Their females had gowns, and several ornaments for the arms, hands, and neck¹⁶.

THE Saxons who invaded Thuringia in the sixth century are described by Wittichind as leaning on small shields, with long lances, and with great knives, or crooked swords, by their sides¹⁷. Fa-

¹² Wittichind, p. 5.

¹³ 1 Linden. Codex legum, p. 474.

¹⁴ Paul: Warnefrid de gest. Langob lib. iv. c. 23, p. 838. Grot. ed. The vest is mentioned in the old Saxon law, p. 474, and their idol Crodus had one.—Fabric. Hist. Sax. tom. i. p. 61.

¹⁵ Wittichind, p. 5, and see Lindenbrog Glossary Voc. Sagum, and Weiß. The curious may see a description of the dress of a Franc in the Monk of St. Gall's life of Charlemagne, and of a Longobard. in P. Warnefridus, lib. iv. c. 23.


¹⁶ One is called in the old Anglian law the Rhedo, to the stealing of which the same penalty was attached as to stealing six sows with pig. The mother, in the same law, might at her death leave to her son, land, slaves, and money; to her daughter, the ornaments of the neck; id est, *muranas* (necklaces), *nufcas*, *monilia* (collars), *inaures* (ear-rings), *vestes*, *armillas* (bracelets) vel quidquid ornamenti proprii videbatur habuisse. 1 Lindenb. p. 484.

¹⁷ Wittichind, 5. As Tacitus remarks that the Germans seldom had swords, and more generally javelins, there is some plausibility in the derivation of the Saxon name from their *sachs*, or peculiar swords. The Cimbri on the contrary had great and long swords, according to Plutarch in his life of Marius.

bricius,

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bricius, an author of the sixteenth century, saw in C H A P.
 an ancient picture of a Saxon, a sword bent into a ^{l.} 
 semilunar shape ¹⁸. He adds, that their shields were
 suspended by chains, that their horsemen used iron
 sledges ¹⁹, and that their armour was heavy. I
 have not met with the documents from which he
 took these circumstances.

¹⁸ Fabric. i. p. 66.

¹⁹ The favourite weapon of Thor, according to the
 northern eddas, was a mallet.