HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

BOOK I.

THE SOURCE.

CHAPTER I.

The Saxons.

1.

As you coast the North Sea from the Scheldt to Jutland, you will mark in the first place that the characteristic feature is the want of slope; marsh, waste, shoal; the rivers hardly drag themselves along, swollen and sluggish, with long, black-looking waves; the flooding stream oozes over the banks, and appears further on in stagnant pools. In Holland the soil is but a sediment of mud; here and there only does the earth cover it with a crust, shallow and brittle, the mere alluvium of the river, which the river seems ever about to destroy. Thick clouds hover above, being fed by ceaseless exhalations. They lazily turn their violet flanks, grow black, suddenly descend in heavy showers; the vapour, like a furnace-smoke, crawls for ever on the horizon. Thus watered, plants multiply; in the angle between Jutland and the continent, in a fat muddy soil, "the verdure is as
fresh as that of England.”¹ Immense forests covered the land even after the eleventh century. The sap of this humid country, thick and potent, circulates in man as in the plants; man’s respiration, nutrition, sensations and habits affect also his faculties and his frame.

The land produced after this fashion has one enemy, to wit, the sea. Holland maintains its existence only by virtue of its dykes. In 1654 those in Jutland burst, and fifteen thousand of the inhabitants were swallowed up. One need only see the blast of the North swirl down upon the low level of the soil, wan and ominous:² the vast yellow sea dashes against the narrow belt of flat coast which seems incapable of a moment’s resistance; the wind howls and bellows; the sea-mews cry; the poor little ships flee as fast as they can, bending almost to the gunwale, and endeavour to find a refuge in the mouth of the river, which seems as hostile as the sea. A sad and precarious existence, as it were face to face with a beast of prey. The Frisians, in their ancient laws, speak already of the league they have made against “the ferocious ocean.” Even in a calm this sea is unsafe. “Before me roll eth a waste of water . . . and above me go rolling the storm-clouds, the formless dark grey daughters of air, which from the sea, in cloudy buckets scoop up the water, ever wearied lifting and lifting, and then pour it again in the sea, a mournful, wearisome

¹ Malte-Brun, iv. 398. Not counting bays, gulfs, and canals, the sixteenth part of the country is covered by water. The dialect of Jutland bears still a great resemblance to English.

² See Ruysdael’s painting in Mr. Baring’s collection. Of the three Saxon islands, North Strandt, Busen, and Heligoland, North Strandt was inundated by the sea in 1800, 1483, 1532, 1615, and almost destroyed in 1634. Busen is a level plain, beaten by storms, which it has been found necessary to surround by a dyke. Heligoland was laid waste by the sea in 800, 1800, 1500, 1649, the last time so violently that only a portion of it remained.—Turner, *Hist. of Angl. Saxons*, 1852, i. 97.
business. Over the sea, flat on his face, lies the monstrous, terrible North wind, sighing and sinking his voice as in secret, like an old grumbler, for once in good humour, unto the ocean he talks, and he tells her wonderful stories."¹ Rain, wind, and surge leave room for naught but gloomy and melancholy thoughts. The very joy of the billows has in it an inexplicable restlessness and harshness. From Holland to Jutland, a string of small, deluged islands² bears witness to their ravages; the shifting sands which the tide drifts up obstruct and impede the banks and entrance of the rivers.³ The first Roman fleet, a thousand sail, perished there; to this day ships wait a month or more in sight of port, tossed upon the great white waves, not daring to risk themselves in the shifting, winding channel, notorious for its wrecks. In winter a breastplate of ice covers the two streams; the sea drives back the frozen masses as they descend; they pile themselves with a crash upon the sandbanks, and sway to and fro; now and then you may see a vessel, seized as in a vice, split in two beneath their violence. Picture, in this foggy clime, amid hoar-frost and storm, in these marshes and forests, half-naked savages, a kind of wild beasts, fishers and hunters, but especially hunters of men; these are they, Saxons, Angles, Jutes, Frisians;⁴ later on, Danes, who during the fifth and the ninth centuries, with their swords and battle-axes, took and kept the island of Britain.

² Watten, Platen, Sande, Düneinseln.
³ Nine or ten miles out, near Heligoland, are the nearest soundings of about fifty fathoms.
⁴ Palgrave, *Saxon Commonwealth*, vol. i.
A rude and foggy land, like their own, except in the depth of its sea and the safety of its coasts, which one day will call up real fleets and mighty vessels; green England—the word rises to the lips and expresses all. Here also moisture pervades everything; even in summer the mist rises; even on clear days you perceive it fresh from the great sea-girdle, or rising from vast but ever slushy meadows, undulating with hill and dale, intersected with hedges to the limit of the horizon. Here and there a sunbeam strikes on the higher grasses with burning flash, and the splendour of the verdure dazzles and almost blinds you. The overflowing water straightens the flabby stems; they grow up, rank, weak, and filled with sap; a sap ever renewed, for the gray mists creep under a stratum of motionless vapour, and at distant intervals the rim of heaven is drenched by heavy showers. "There are yet commons as at the time of the Conquest, deserted, abandoned, wild, covered with furze and thorny plants, with here and there a horse grazing in solitude. Joyless scene, unproductive soil! What a labour it has been to humanise it! What impression it must have made on the men of the South, the Romans of Caesar! I thought, when I saw it, of the ancient Saxons, wanderers from West and North, who came to settle in this land of marsh and fogs, on the border of primeval forests, on the banks of these great muddy streams, which roll down their slime to meet the waves. They must have lived as hunters and swineherds; growing, as before, brawny, fierce, gloomy.

1 Notes of a Journey in England.
2 Léonce de Lavergne, De l’Agriculture anglaise. "The soil is much worse than that of France."
3 There are at least four rivers in England passing by the name of "Ouse," which is only another form of "Oxen."—T&.
CHAP. I.  
THE SAXONS.  

Take civilisation from this soil, and there will remain to the inhabitants only war, the chase, gluttony, drunkenness. Smiling love, sweet poetical dreams, art, refined and nimble thought, are for the happy shores of the Mediterranean. Here the barbarian, ill housed in his mud-hovel, who hears the rain pattering whole days among the oak leaves—what dreams can he have, gazing upon his mud-pools and his sombre sky?"

II.

Huge white bodies, cool-blooded, with fierce blue eyes, reddish flaxen hair; ravenous stomachs, filled with meat and cheese, heated by strong drinks; of a cold temperament, slow to love,\(^1\) home-stayers, prone to brutal drunkenness: these are to this day the features which descent and climate preserve in the race, and these are what the Roman historians discovered in their former country. There is no living, in these lands, without abundance of solid food; bad weather keeps people at home; strong drinks are necessary to cheer them; the senses become blunted, the muscles are braced, the will vigorous. In every country the body of man is rooted deep into the soil of nature; and in this instance still deeper, because, being uncultivated, he is less removed from nature. In Germany, storm-beaten, in wretched boats of hide, amid the hardships and dangers of seafaring life, they were pre-eminently adapted for endurance and enterprise, inured to misfortune, scorners of danger. Pirates at first: of all

\(^{1}\) Tacitus, De moribus Germanorun, passim: Diem noctemque continuare potando, nulli probrum.—Sera juvenum Venus.—Totos dies juxta focum atque ignem agunt. Dargaud, Voyage en Danemark.  
"They take six meals per day, the first at five o'clock in the morning. One should see the faces and meals at Hamburg and at Amsterdam."
kinds of hunting the man-hunt is most profitable and most noble; they left the care of the land and flocks to the women and slaves; seafaring, war, and pillage\(^1\) was their whole idea of a freeman's work. They dashed to sea in their two-sailed barks, landed anywhere, killed everything; and having sacrificed in honour of their gods the tithe of their prisoners, and leaving behind them the red light of their burnings, went farther on to begin again. "Lord," says a certain litany, "deliver us from the fury of the Jutes." "Of all barbarians\(^2\) these are strongest of body and heart, the most formidable,"—we may add, the most cruelly ferocious. When murder becomes a trade, it becomes a pleasure. About the eighth century, the final decay of the great Roman corpse which Charlemagne had tried to revive, and which was settling down into corruption, called them like vultures to the prey. Those who had remained in Denmark, with their brothers of Norway, fanatical pagans, incensed against the Christians, made a descent on all the surrounding coasts. Their sea-kings\(^3\) "who had never slept under the smoky rafters of a roof, who had never drained the ale-horn by an inhabited hearth," laughed at wind and storms, and sang: "The blast of the tempest aids our ears; the bellowing of heaven, the howling of the thunder, hurt us not; the hurricane is our servant, and drives us whither we wish to go." "We hewed with our swords," says a song attributed to Ragnar Lodbrog; "was it not like that hour when my bright bride I seated by me on the couch?" One of


\(^2\) Zosimus, iii. 147. Amm. Marcellinus, xxvii. 526.

\(^3\) Aug. Thierry, *Hist. S. Edmundi*, vi. 441. See *Ynglingasaga*, and especially Egil's *Saga*. 
them, at the monastery of Peterborough, kills with his own hand all the monks, to the number of eighty-four; others, having taken King Ælla, divided his ribs from the spine, drew his lungs out, and threw salt into his wounds. Harold Harefoot, having seized his rival Alfred, with six hundred men, had them maimed, blinded, hamstrung, scalped, or embowelled.\textsuperscript{1} Torture and carnage, greed of danger, fury of destruction, obstinate and frenzied bravery of an over-strong temperament, the unchaining of the butcherly instincts,—such traits meet us at every step in the old Sagas. The daughter of the Danish Jarl, seeing Egil taking his seat near her, repels him with scorn, reproaching him with "seldom having provided the wolves with hot meat, with never having seen for the whole autumn a raven croaking over the carnage." But Egil seized her and pacified her by singing: "I have marched with my bloody sword, and the raven has followed me. Furiously we fought, the fire passed over the dwellings of men; we have sent to sleep in blood those who kept the gates." From such table-talk, and such maidenly tastes, we may judge of the rest.\textsuperscript{2}

Behold them now in England, more settled and wealthier: do you expect to find them much changed? Changed it may be, but for the worse, like the Franks,

\textsuperscript{1} Lingard, \textit{Hist. of England}, i. 164, says, however, "Every tenth man out of the six hundred received his liberty, and of the rest a few were selected for slavery."—Tr.

\textsuperscript{2} Franks, Frisians, Saxons, Danes, Norwegians, Icelanders, are one and the same people. Their language, laws, religion, poetry, differ but little. The more northern continue longest in their primitive manners. Germany in the fourth and fifth centuries, Denmark and Norway in the seventh and eighth, Iceland in the tenth and eleventh centuries, present the same condition, and the monuments of each country will fill up the gaps that exist in the history of the others.
like all barbarians who pass from action to enjoyment. They are more gluttonous, carving their hogs, filling themselves with flesh, swallowing down deep draughts of mead, ale, spiced wines, all the strong, coarse drinks which they can procure, and so they are cheered and stimulated. Add to this the pleasure of the fight. Not easily with such instincts can they attain to culture; to find a natural and ready culture, we must look amongst the sober and sprightly populations of the south. Here the sluggish and heavy temperament remains long buried in a brutal life; people of the Latin race never at a first glance see in them aught but large gross beasts, clumsy and ridiculous when not dangerous and enraged. Up to the sixteenth century, says an old historian, the great body of the nation were little else than herdsmen, keepers of cattle and sheep; up to the end of the eighteenth drunkenness was the recreation of the higher ranks; it is still that of the lower; and all the refinement and softening influence of civilisation have not abolished amongst them the use of the rod and the fist. If the carnivorous, warlike, drinking savage, proof against the climate, still shows beneath the conventions of our modern society and the softness of our modern polish, imagine what he must have been when, landing with his band upon a wasted or desert country, and becoming for the first time a settler, he saw extending to the horizon the common pastures of the border country, and the great primitive forests which furnished stags for the chase and acorns for his pigs. The ancient histories tell us that they had a great and a coarse appetite. Even at the time of the Conquest the custom of drinking to excess

was a common vice with men of the highest rank, and they passed in this way whole days and nights without intermission. * Henry of Huntingdon, in the twelfth century, lamenting the ancient hospitality, says that the Norman kings provided their courtiers with only one meal a day, while the Saxon kings used to provide four. One day, when Athelstan went with his nobles to visit his relative Ethelfleda, the provision of mead was exhausted at the first salutation, owing to the copiousness of the draughts; but Dunstan, forecasting the extent of the royal appetite, had furnished the house, so that the cup-bearers, as is the custom at royal feasts, were able the whole day to serve it out in horns and other vessels, and the liquor was not found to be deficient. When the guests were satisfied, the harp passed from hand to hand, and the rude harmony of their deep voices swelled under the vaulted roof. The monasteries themselves in Edgward's time kept up games, songs, and dances till midnight. To shout, to drink, to gesticulate, to feel their veins heated and swollen with wine, to hear and see around them the riotous orgies, this was the first need of the Barbarians. The heavy human brute gluts himself with sensations and with noise.

For such appetites there was a stronger food,—I mean blows and battle. In vain they attached themselves to the soil, became tillers of the ground, in distinct communities and distinct regions, shut up in their march

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1 Tacitus, De moribus Germanorum, xxii. xxiii.
2 Kemble, Saxons in England, 1849, i. 70, ii. 184. "The Acts of an Anglo-Saxon parliament are a series of treaties of peace between all the associations which make up the State; a continual revision and renewal of the alliances offensive and defensive of all the free men. They are universally mutual contracts for the maintenance of the frid or peace."
with their kindred and comrades, bound together, separated from the mass, enclosed by sacred landmarks, by primval oaks on which they cut the figures of birds and beasts, by poles set up in the midst of the marsh, which whosoever removed was punished with cruel tortures. In vain these Marches and Ga’s were grouped into states, and finally formed a half-regulated society, with assemblies and laws, under the lead of a single king; its very structure indicates the necessities to supply which it was created. They united in order to maintain peace; treaties of peace occupy their Parliaments; provisions for peace are the matter of their laws. War was waged daily and everywhere; the aim of life was, not to be slain, ransomed, mutilated, pillaged, hung and of course, if it was a woman, violated. Every man was obliged to appear armed, and to be ready, with his burgh or his township, to repel marauders, who went about in bands. The animal was yet too powerful, too impetuous, too untamed. Anger and covetousness in the first place brought him upon his prey. Their history, I mean that of the Heptarchy, is like a history of “kites and crows.” They slew the Britons or reduced them to slavery, fought the remnant of the Welsh, Irish, and Picts, massacred one another, were hewn down and cut to pieces by the Danes. In a hundred years, out of fourteen kings of Northumbria,

1 A large district; the word is still existing in German, as Rheingau, Breisgau.—Tr.
2 Turner, Hist. of the Anglo-Sax. ii. 440, Laws of Ina.
3 Such a band consisted of thirty-five men or more.
4 Milton’s expression. Lingard’s History, i. chap. 8. This history bears much resemblance to that of the Franks in Gaul. See Gregory of Tours. The Saxons, like the Franks, somewhat softened, but rather degenerated, were pillaged and massacred by those of their northern brothers who still remained in a savage state.
seven were slain and six deposed. Penda of Mercia killed five kings, and in order to take the town of Bam- 
borough, demolished all the neighbouring villages, heaped 
their ruins into an immense pile, sufficient to burn all 
the inhabitants, undertook to exterminate the Northum-
brians, and perished himself by the sword at the age of 
eighty. Many amongst them were put to death by the 
thanes; one thane was burned alive; brothers slew one 
another treacherously. With us civilisation has inter-
posed, between the desire and its fulfilment, the counter-
acting and softening preventive of reflection and calcu-
lation; here, the impulse is sudden, and murder and 
every kind of excess spring from it instantaneously. 
King Edwy¹ having married Elgiva, his relation within 
the prohibited degrees, quitted the hall where he was 
drinking on the very day of his coronation, to be with 
her. The nobles thought themselves insulted, and 
immediately Abbot Dunstan went himself to seek the 
young man. "He found the adulteress," says the monk 
Osbern, "her mother, and the king together on the bed 
of debauch. He dragged the king thence violently, and 
setting the crown upon his head, brought him back to 
the nobles." Afterwards Elgiva sent men to put out 
Dunstan's eyes, and then, in a revolt, saved herself and 
the king by hiding in the country; but the men of the 
North having seized her, "hamstrung her, and then sub-
jected her to the death which she deserved."² Barbarity 
follows barbarity. At Bristol, at the time of the Con-
quest, as we are told by an historian of the time,³ it was

¹ Vita S. Dunstani, Anglia Sacra, ii.
² It is amusing to compare the story of Edwy and Elgiva in Turner, 
i. 216, etc., and then in Lingard, i. 182, etc. The first accuses Dunstan, 
the other defends him.—Tr.
³ Life of Bishop Wolstan.
the custom to buy men and women in all parts of England, and to carry them to Ireland for sale in order to make money. The buyers usually made the young women pregnant, and took them to market in that condition, in order to ensure a better price. "You might have seen with sorrow long files of young people of both sexes and of the greatest beauty, bound with ropes, and daily exposed for sale. . . . They sold in this manner as slaves their nearest relatives, and even their own children." And the chronicler adds that, having abandoned this practice, they "thus set an example to all the rest of England." Would you know the manners of the highest ranks, in the family of the last king?¹ At a feast in the king's hall, Harold was serving Edward the Confessor with wine, when Tostig, his brother, moved by envy, seized him by the hair. They were separated. Tostig went to Hereford, where Harold had ordered a royal banquet to be prepared. There he seized his brother's attendants, and cutting off their heads and limbs, he placed them in the vessels of wine, ale, mead, and cider, and sent a message to the king: "If you go to your farm, you will find there plenty of salt meat, but you will do well to carry some more with you." Harold's other brother, Sweyn, had violated the abbess Elgiva, assassinated Beorn the thane, and being banished from the country, had turned pirate. When we regard their deeds of violence, their ferocity, their cannibal jests, we see that they were not far removed from the sea-kings, or from the followers of Odin, who

¹ Tantæ savitis erant fratres illi quod, cum aliquius nitidam villam conspicerent, dominatorem de nocte interfici juberent, totamque progeniem illius possessionemque defuncti obtinerent. Turner, iii. 27. Henry of Huntington, vi. 367
atraw flesh, hung men as victims on the sacred trees of Upsala, and killed themselves to make sure of dying as they had lived, in blood. A score of times the old ferocious instinct reappears beneath the thin crust of Christianity. In the eleventh century, Siward, the great Earl of Northumberland, was afflicted with a dysentery; and feeling his death near, exclaimed, "What a shame for me not to have been permitted to die in so many battles, and to end thus by a cow's death! At least put on my breastplate, gird on my sword, set my helmet on my head, my shield in my left hand, my battle-axe in my right, so that a stout warrior, like myself, may die as a warrior." They did as he bade, and thus died he honourably in his armour. They had made one step, and only one, from barbarism.

III.

Under this native barbarism there were noble dispositions, unknown to the Roman world, which were destined to produce a better people out of its ruins. In the first place, "a certain earnestness, which leads them out of frivolous sentiments to noble ones." From their origin in Germany this is what we find them, severe in manners, with grave inclinations and a manly dignity. They live solitary, each one near the spring or the wood which has taken his fancy. Even in villages the cottages were detached; they must have independence and free air. They had no taste for voluptuousness; love was tardy, education severe, their food simple; all the re-

2 Grimm, Mythology, 53, Preface.
3 Tacitus, xx. xxiii. xi. xii. xiii. et passim. We may still see the traces of this taste in English dwellings.

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creation they indulged in was the hunting of the aurochs, and a dance amongst naked swords. Violent intoxication and perilous wagers were their weakest points; they sought in preference not mild pleasures, but strong excitement. In everything, even in their rude and masculine instincts, they were men. Each in his own home, on his land and in his hut, was his own master, upright and free, in no wise restrained or shackled. If the commonweal received anything from him, it was because he gave it. He gave his vote in arms in all great conferences, passed judgment in the assembly, made alliances and wars on his own account, moved from place to place, showed activity and daring. The modern Englishman existed entire in this Saxon. If he bends, it is because he is quite willing to bend; he is no less capable of self-denial than of independence; self-sacrifice is not uncommon, a man cares not for his blood or his life. In Homer the warrior often gives way, and is not blamed if he flees. In the Sagas, in the Edda, he must be over-brave; in Germany the coward is drowned in the mud, under a hurdle. Through all outbreaks of primitive brutality gleams obscurely the grand idea of duty, which is, the self-constraint exercised in view of some noble end. Marriage was pure amongst them, chastity instinctive. Amongst the Saxons the adulterer was punished by death; the adulteress was obliged to hang herself, or was stabbed by the knives of her companions. The wives of the Cimbrians, when they could not obtain from Marius assurance of their chastity, slew themselves with their own hands. They thought there was something sacred in a woman; they married but one, and kept faith with her. In fifteen centuries the idea

1 Tacitus, xiii.
of marriage is unchanged amongst them. The wife, on entering her husband’s home, is aware that she gives herself altogether,\(^1\) “that she will have but one body, one life with him; that she will have no thought, no desire beyond: that she will be the companion of his perils and labours; that she will suffer and dare as much as he, both in peace and war.” And he, like her, knows that he gives himself. Having chosen his chief, he forgets himself in him, assigns to him his own glory, serves him to the death. “He is infamous as long as he lives, who returns from the field of battle without his chief.”\(^2\) It was on this voluntary subordination that feudal society was based. Man in this race, can accept a superior, can be capable of devotion and respect. Thrown back upon himself by the gloom and severity of his climate, he has discovered moral beauty, while others discover sensuous beauty. This kind of naked brute, who lies all day by his fireside, sluggish and dirty, always eating and drinking,\(^3\) whose rusty faculties cannot follow the clear and fine outlines of happily created poetic forms, catches a glimpse of the sublime in his troubled dreams. He does not see it, but simply feels it; his religion is already within, as it will be in the sixteenth century, when he will cast off the sensuous worship imported from Rome, and hallow the faith of the heart.\(^4\) His gods are not enclosed in walls; he has no idols. What he designates by divine names, is something invisible and grand, which floats through nature, and is conceived beyond

\(^1\) Tacitus, xix. vii. xvi. Kemble, i. 292.
\(^2\) Tacitus, xiv.
\(^3\) “In omni domo, nudi et sordidi. . . . Plus per otium transigunt, dediti somno, oboque; totos dies juxta focum atque ignem agunt.”
\(^4\) Grimm, 52, Preface. Tacitus, x.
nature, a mysterious infinity which the sense cannot touch, but which "reverence alone can feel;" and when, later on, the legends define and alter this vague divination of natural powers, one idea remains at the bottom of this chaos of giant-dreams, namely, that the world is a warfare, and heroism the highest good.

In the beginning, say the old Icelandic legends, there were two worlds, Niftheim the frozen, and Muspell the burning. From the falling snow-flakes was born the giant Ymir. "There was in times of old, where Ymir dwelt, nor sand nor sea, nor gelid waves; earth existed not, nor heaven above; 'twas a chaotic chasm, and grass nowhere." There was but Ymir, the horrible frozen Ocean, with his children, sprung from his feet and his armpits; then their shapeless progeny, Terrors of the abyss, barren Mountains, Whirlwinds of the North, and other malevolent beings, enemies of the sun and of life; then the cow Andhumbla, born also of melting snow, brings to light, whilst licking the hoar-frost from the rocks, a man Bur, whose grandsons kill the giant Ymir. "From his flesh the earth was formed, and from his bones the hills, the heaven from the skull of that ice-cold giant, and from his blood the sea; but of his brains the heavy clouds are all created." Then arose war between the monsters of winter and the luminous fertile gods, Odin the founder, Baldr the mild and

1 "Deorum nominibus appellant secretum illud, quod sola reverentia vident." Later on, at Upsala for instance, they had images (Adam of Bremen, Historia Ecclesiastica). Wotan (Odin) signifies etymologically the All-Powerful, him who penetrates and circulates through everything (Grimm, Mythol.)

2 Snæmundar Edda, Snorra Edda, ed. Copenhagen, three vols. passim. Mr. Bergmann has translated several of these poems into French, which Mr. Taine quotes. The translator has generally made use of the edition of Mr. Thorpe, London, 1866.
benevolent, Thor the summer-thunder, who purifies the air, and nourishes the earth with showers. Long fought the gods against the frozen Jötuns, against the dark bestial powers, the Wolf Fenrir, the great Serpent, whom they drown in the sea, the treacherous Loki, whom they bind to the rocks, beneath a viper whose venom drops continually on his face. Long will the heroes, who by a bloody death deserve to be placed "in the halls of Odin, and there wage a combat every day," assist the gods in their mighty war. A day will, however, arrive when gods and men will be conquered. Then

"trembles Yggdrasil's ash yet standing; groans that ancient tree, and the Jötun Loki is loosed. The shadows groan on the ways of Hel, until the fire of Surt has consumed the tree. Hrym steers from the east, the waters rise, the mundane snake is coiled in jötun-rage. The worm beats the water, and the eagle screams; the pale of beak tears carcasses; (the ship) Naglfar is loosed. Surt from the South comes with flickering flame; shines from his sword the Val-god's sun. The stony hills are dashed together, the giantesses totter; men tread the path of Hel, and heaven is cloven. The sun darkens, earth in ocean sinks, fall from heaven the bright stars, fire's breath assails the all-nourishing tree, towering fire plays against heaven itself." 

The gods perish, devoured one by one by the monsters; and the celestial legend, sad and grand now like the life of man, bears witness to the hearts of warriors and heroes.

There is no fear of pain, no care for life; they count it as dross when the idea has seized upon them. The

1 Hel, the goddess of death, born of Loki and Angrboda.—Tt.
trembling of the nerves, the repugnance of animal instinct which starts back before wounds and death, are all lost in an irresistible determination. See how in their epic the sublime springs up amid the horrible, like a bright purple flower amid a pool of blood. Sigurd has plunged his sword into the dragon Fafnir, and at that very moment they looked on one another; and Fafnir asks, as he dies, "Who art thou? and who is thy father? and what thy kin, that thou wert so hardy as to bear weapons against me?" "A hardy heart urged me on thereto, and a strong hand and this sharp sword. . . . Seldom hath hardy eld a faint-heart youth."

After this triumphant eagle’s cry Sigurd cuts out the worm’s heart; but Regin, brother of Fafnir, drinks blood from the wound, and falls asleep. Sigurd, who was roasting the heart, raises his finger thoughtlessly to his lips. Forthwith he understands the language of the birds. The eagles scream above him in the branches. They warn him to mistrust Regin. Sigurd cuts off the latter’s head, eats of Fafnir’s heart, drinks his blood and his brother’s. Amongst all these murders their courage and poetry grow. Sigurd has subdued Brynhild, the untamed maiden, by passing through the flaming fire; they share one couch for three nights, his naked sword betwixt them. "Nor the damsel did he kiss, nor did the Hunnish king to his arm lift her. He the blooming maid to Giuki’s son delivered," because, according to his oath, he must send her to her betrothed Gunnar. She, setting her love upon

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1 Fasmisal Edda. This epic is common to the Northern races, as is the Iliad to the Greek populations, and is found almost entire in Germany in the Nibelungen Lied. The translator has also used Magnusson and Morris’ poetical version of the Volsunga Saga, and certain songs of the Elder Edda, London, 1870.
him, “Alone she sat without, at eve of day, began aloud with herself to speak: ‘Sigurd must be mine; I must die, or that blooming youth clasp in my arms.’” But seeing him married, she brings about his death. “Laughed then Brynhild, Budli’s daughter, once only, from her whole soul, when in her bed she listened to the loud lament of Giuki’s daughter.” She put on her golden corslet, pierced herself with the sword’s point, and as a last request said:

“Let in the plain be raised a pile so spacious, that for us all like room may be; let them burn the Hun (Sigurd) on the one side of me, on the other side my household slaves, with collars splendid, two at our heads, and two hawks; let also lie between us both the keen-edged sword, as when we both one couch ascended; also five female thralls, eight male slaves of gentle birth fostered with me.”

All were burnt together; yet Gudrun the widow continued motionless by the corpse, and could not weep. The wives of the jarls came to console her, and each of them told her own sorrows, all the calamities of great devastations and the old life of barbarism.

“Then spoke Giaflang, Giuki’s sister: ‘Lo, up on earth I live most loveless, who of five mates must see the ending, of daughters twain and three sisters, of brethren eight, and abide behind lonely.’ Then spake Herborg, Queen of Hunland: ‘Crueller tale have I to tell of my seven sons, down in the Southlands; and the eight man, my mate, felled in the death-mead. Father and mother, and four brothers on the wide sea the winds and death played with; the billows beat on the bulwark boards. Alone must I sing o’er them, alone must I array them, alone must my hands deal with their departing; and all this was in

1 Thorpe, The Edda of Saxum, Third Lay of Sigurd Fafniricida, str. 62-64, p. 83.
one season’s wearing, and none was left for love or solace. Then
was I bound a prey of the battle when that same season wore
to its ending; as a tiring may must I bind the shoon of the
duke’s high dame, every day at dawning. From her jealous
hate gat I heavy mocking, cruel lashes she laid upon me.’” 1

All was in vain; no word could draw tears from those
dry eyes. They were obliged to lay the bloody corpse
before her, ere her tears would come. Then tears flowed
through the pillow; as “the geese withal that were in
the home-field, the fair fowls the may owned, fell a-
screaming.” She would have died, like Sigrun, on the
corpse of him whom alone she had loved, if they had
not deprived her of memory by a magic potion. Thus
affected, she departs in order to marry Atli, king of the
Huns; and yet she goes against her will, with gloomy
forebodings: for murder begets murder; and her
brothers, the murderers of Sigurd, having been drawn
to Atli’s court, fall in their turn into a snare like that
which they had themselves laid. Then Gunnar was
bound, and they tried to make him deliver up the
treasure. He answers with a barbarian’s laugh:

“‘Högni’s heart in my hand shall lie, cut bloody from the
breast of the valiant chief, the king’s son, with a dull-edged
knife.’ They the heart cut out from Æiáli’s breast; on a dish,
bleeding, laid it, and it to Gunnar bare. Then said Gunnar,
lord of men: ‘Here have I the heart of the timid Æiáli, unlike
the heart of the bold Högni; for much it trembles as in the dish
it lies; it trembled more by half while in his breast it lay.”
Högni laughed when to his heart they cut the living crest-
changer; no lament uttered he. All bleeding on a dish they
laid it, and it to Gunnar bare. Calmly said Gunnar, the warrior

1 Magnusson and Morris, Story of the Volsunga and Niblungs,
Lamentation of Gudrun, p. 118 et passim.
Niflung: 'Here have I the heart of the bold Högni, unlike the heart of the timid Hialli; for it little trembles as in the dish it lies: it trembled less while in his breast it lay. So far shalt thou, Atli! be from the eyes of men as thou wilt from the treasures be. In my power alone is all the hidden Niflung's gold, now that Högni lives not. Ever was I wavering while we both lived; now am I so no longer, as I alone survive.'" 1

It was the last insult of the self-confident man, who values neither his own life nor that of another, so that he can satiate his vengeance. They cast him into the serpent's den, and there he died, striking his harp with his foot. But the inextinguishable flame of vengeance passed from his heart to that of his sister. Corpse after corpse fell on each other; a mighty fury hurls them open-eyed to death. She killed the children she had by Atli, and one day on his return from the carnage, gave him their hearts to eat, served in honey, and laughed coldly as she told him on what he had fed. "Uproar was on the benches, portentous the cry of men, noise beneath the costly hangings. The children of the Huns wept; all wept save Gudrun, who never wept or for her bear-fierce brothers, or for her dear sons, young, simple." 2 Judge from this heap of ruin and carnage to what excess the will is strung. There were men amongst them, Berserkirs, 3 who in battle seized with a sort of madness, showed a sudden and super-human strength, and ceased to feel their wounds. This is the conception of a hero as engendered by this race in its infancy. Is it not strange to see them place

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2 Ibid. str. 36, p. 119.
3 This word signifies men who fought without a breastplate, perhaps in shirts only; Scotch. "Barsearks."—Th.
their happiness in battle, their beauty in death? Is there any people, Hindoo, Persian, Greek, or Gallic, which has formed so tragic a conception of life? Is there any which has peopled its infantine mind with such gloomy dreams? Is there any which has so entirely banished from its dreams the sweetness of enjoyment, and the softness of pleasure? Endeavours, tenacious and mournful endeavours, an ecstasy of endeavours—such was their chosen condition. Carlyle said well, that in the sombre obstinacy of an English labourer still survives the tacit rage of the Scandinavian warrior. Strife for strife’s sake—such is their pleasure. With what sadness, madness, destruction, such a disposition breaks its bonds, we shall see in Shakspeare and Byron; with what vigour and purpose it can limit and employ itself when possessed by moral ideas, we shall see in the case of the Puritans.

IV.

They have established themselves in England; and however disordered the society which binds them together, it is founded, as in Germany, on generous sentiment. War is at every door, I am aware, but warlike virtues are within every house; courage chiefly, then fidelity. Under the brute there is a free man, and a man of spirit. There is no man amongst them who, at his own risk, will not make alliance, go forth to fight, undertake adventures. There is no group of free men amongst them, who, in their Witenagemote, is not for ever concluding alliances one with another. Every clan, in its own district, forms a league of which

1 See the Life of Sweyn, of Hereward, etc., even up to the time of the Conquest.
all the members, "brothers of the sword," defend each other, and demand revenge for the spilling of blood, at the price of their own. Every chief in his hall reckons that he has friends, not mercenaries, in the faithful ones who drink his beer, and who, having received as marks of his esteem and confidence, bracelets, swords, and suits of armour, will cast themselves between him and danger on the day of battle. Independence and boldness rage amongst this young nation with violence and excess; but these are of themselves noble things; and no less noble are the sentiments which serve them for discipline,—to wit, an affectionate devotion, and respect for plighted faith. These appear in their laws, and break forth in their poetry. Amongst them greatness of heart gives matter for imagination. Their characters are not selfish and shifty, like those of Homer. They are brave hearts, simple and strong, faithful to their relatives, to their master in arms, firm and steadfast to enemies and friends, abounding in courage, and ready for sacrifice. "Old as I am," says one, "I will not budge hence. I mean to die by my lord's side, near this man I have loved so much. He kept his word, the word he had given to his chief, to the distributor of gifts, promising him that they should return to the town, safe and sound to their homes, or that they would fall both together, in the thick of the carnage, covered with wounds. He lies by his master's side, like a faithful servant." Though awkward in speech, their old poets find touching words when they have to paint these manly friendships. We cannot without emotion hear them relate how the old "king embraced the best of his thanes, and put his arms about his neck, how the tears flowed down the cheeks of the

1 Beowulf, passim, Death of Byrhtnoth.
greyhaired chief... The valiant man was so dear to him. He could not stop the flood which mounted from his breast. In his heart, deep in the chords of his soul, he sighed in secret after the beloved man." Few as are the songs which remain to us, they return to this subject again and again. The wanderer in a reverie dreams about his lord: 1 It seems to him in his spirit as if he kisses and embraces him, and lays head and hands upon his knees, as oft before in the olden time, when he rejoiced in his gifts. Then he wakes—a man without friends. He sees before him the desert tracks, the seabirds dipping in the waves, stretching wide their wings, the frost and the snow, mingled with falling hail. Then his heart's wounds press more heavily. The exile says:—

"In blithe habits full oft we, too, agreed that nought else should divide us except death alone; at length this is changed, and as if it had never been is now our friendship. To endure enmities man orders me to dwell in the bower of the forest, under the oak tree in this earthy cave. Cold is this earth-dwelling: I am quite weariest out. Dim are the dells, high up are the mountains, a bitter city of twigs, with briars overgrown, a joyless abode... My friends are in the earth; those loved in life, the tomb holds them. The grave is guarding, while I above alone am going. Under the oak-tree, beyond this earth-cave, there I must sit the long summer-day."

Amid their perilous mode of life, and the perpetual appeal to arms, there exists no sentiment more warm than friendship, nor any virtue stronger than loyalty.

Thus supported by powerful affection and trysted word, society is kept wholesome. Marriage is like the

1 The Wanderer, the Exile's Song, Codex Exoniensis, published by Thorpe.
We find women associating with the men, at their feasts, sober and respected. She speaks, and they listen to her; no need for concealing or enslaving her, in order to restrain or retain her. She is a person, and not a thing. The law demands her consent to marriage, surrounds her with guarantees, accords her protection. She can inherit, possess, bequeath, appear in courts of justice, in county assemblies, in the great congress of the elders. Frequently the name of the queen and of several other ladies is inscribed in the proceedings of the Witenagemote. Law and tradition maintain her integrity, as if she were a man, and side by side with men. Her affections captivate her, as if she were a man, and side by side with men. In Alfred there is a portrait of the wife, which for purity and elevation equals all that we can devise with our modern refinements. “Thy wife now lives for thee— for thee alone. She has enough of all kind of wealth for this present life, but she scorned them all for thy sake alone. She has forsaken them all, because she had not thee with them. Thy absence makes her think that all she possesses is nought. Thus, for love of thee, she is wasted away, and lies near death for tears and grief.”

Already, in the legends of the Edda, we have seen the maiden Sigrun at the tomb of Helgi, “as glad as the voracious hawks of Odin, when they of slaughter know, of warm prey,” desiring to sleep still in the arms of death, and die at last on his grave. Nothing here like the love we find in the primitive poetry of France, Provence, Spain, and Greece. There is an absence of gaiety, of delight;

2 Alfred borrows his portrait from Boethius, but almost entirely re-writes it.
outside of marriage it is only a ferocious appetite, an outbreak of the instinct of the beast. It appears nowhere with its charm and its smile; there is no love song in this ancient poetry. The reason is, that with them love is not an amusement and a pleasure, but a promise and a devotion. All is grave, even sombre, in civil relations as well as in conjugal society. As in Germany, amid the sadness of a melancholic temperament and the savagery of a barbarous life, the most tragic human faculties, the deep power of love and the grand power of will, are the only ones that sway and act.

This is why the hero, as in Germany, is truly heroic. Let us speak of him at length; we possess one of their poems, that of Beowulf, almost entire. Here are the stories, which the Thanes, seated on their stools, by the light of their torches, listened to as they drank the ale of their king: we can glean thence their manners and sentiments, as in the Iliad and the Odyssey those of the Greeks. Beowulf is a hero, a knight-errant before the days of chivalry, as the leaders of the German bands were feudal chiefs before the institution of feudalism. He has “rowed upon the sea, his naked sword hard in his hand, amidst the fierce waves and coldest of storms, and the rage of winter hurled over the waves of the deep.” The sea-monsters, “the many coloured foes, drew him to the bottom of the sea, and held him fast in their gripe.” But he reached “the wretches with his point and with his war-hill.” “The mighty sea-beast received the war-rush through his hands,” and he slew nine Nicors

1 Kemble thinks that the origin of this poem is very ancient, perhaps contemporary with the invasion of the Angles and Saxons, but that the version we possess is later than the seventh century.—Kemble's Beowulf, text and translation, 1833. The characters are Danish.
(sea-monsters). And now behold him, as he comes across the waves to succour the old King Hrothgar, who with his vassals sits afflicted in his great mead-hall, high and curved with pinnacles. For "a grim stranger, Grendel, a mighty haunter of the marshes," had entered his hall during the night, seized thirty of the thanes who were asleep, and returned in his war-craft with their carcasses; for twelve years the dreadful ogre, the beastly and greedy creature, father of Orks and Jotuns, devoured men and emptied the best of houses. Beowulf, the great warrior, offers to grapple with the fiend, and foe to foe contend for life, without the bearing of either sword or ample shield, for he has "learned also that the wretch for his cursed hide recketh not of weapons," asking only that if death takes him, they will bear forth his bloody corpse and bury it; mark his fen-dwelling, and send to Hygeláéc, his chief, the best of war-shrouds that guards his breast.

He is lying in the hall, "trusting in his proud strength; and when the mists of night arose, lo, Grendel comes, tears open the door," seized a sleeping warrior: "he tore him unawares, he bit his body, he drank the blood from the veins, he swallowed him with continual tearings." But Beowulf seized him in turn, and "raised himself upon his elbow."

"The lordly hall thundered, the ale was spilled ... both were enraged; savage and strong warders; the house resounded; then was it a great wonder that the wine-hall withstood the beasts of war, that it fell not upon the earth, the fair palace; but it was thus fast. ... The noise arose, new enough; a fearful terror fell on the North Danes, on each of those who from the wall heard the outcry, God's denier sing his dreadful
lay, his song of defeat, lament his wound.\textsuperscript{1} . . . The foul wretch awaited the mortal wound; a mighty gash was evident upon his shoulder; the sinews sprung asunder, the junctures of the bones burst; success in war was given to Beowulf. Thence must Grendel fly sick unto death, among the refuges of the fens, to seek his joyless dwelling. He all the better knew that the end of his life, the number of his days was gone by."\textsuperscript{2}

For he had left on the ground, "hand, arm, and shoulder;" and "in the lake of Nicors, where he was driven, the rough wave was boiling with blood, the foul spring of waves all mingled, hot with poison; the dye, discoloured with death, bubbled with warlike gore." There remained a female monster, his mother, who like him "was doomed to inhabit the terror of waters, the cold streams," who came by night, and amidst drawn swords tore and devoured another man, \textit{Æschere}, the king’s best friend. A lamentation arose in the palace, and Beowulf offered himself again. They went to the den, a hidden land, the refuge of the wolf, near the windy promontories, where a mountain stream rusheth downwards under the darkness of the hills, a flood beneath the earth; the wood fast by its roots overshadoweth the water; there may one by night behold a marvel, fire upon the flood: the stepper over the heath, when wearied out by the hounds, sooner will give up his soul, his life upon the brink, than plunge therein to hide his head. Strange dragons and serpents swam there; "from time to time the horn sang a dirge, a terrible song." Beowulf plunged into the wave, descended, passed monsters who tore his coat of mail, to the ogress, the hateful manslayer, who, seizing him in her grasp, bore him off to her dwelling. A pale gleam

\textsuperscript{1} Kemble’s \textit{Beowulf}, xi. p. 32. \textsuperscript{2} \textit{Ibid.} xii. p. 34. *
shone brightly, and there, face to face, the good champion perceived

"the she-wolf of the abyss, the mighty sea-woman; he gave the war-onset with his battle-bill; he held not back the swing of the sword, so that on her head the ring-mail sang aloud a greedy war-song.... The beam of war would not bite. Then caught the prince of the War-Greats Grendel’s mother by the shoulder... twisted the homicide, so that she bent upon the floor... She drew her knife broad, brown-edged (and tried to pierce), the twisted breast-net which protected his life.... Then saw he among the weapons a bill fortunate in victory, an old gigantic sword, doughty of edge, ready for use, the work of giants. He seized the belted hilt; the warrior of the Scyldings, fierce and savage whirled the ring-mail; despairing of life, he struck furiously, so that it grappled hard with her about her neck; it broke the bone-rings, the bill passed through all the doomed body; she sank upon the floor; the sword was bloody, the man rejoiced in his deed; the beam shone, light stood within, even as from heaven mildly shines the lamp of the firmament." ¹

Then he saw Grendel dead in a corner of the hall; and four of his companions, having with difficulty raised the monstrous head, bore it by the hair to the palace of the king.

That was his first labour; and the rest of his life was similar. When he had reigned fifty years on earth, a dragon, who had been robbed of his treasure, came from the hill and burned men and houses “with waves of fire.” “Then did the refuge of earls command to make for him a variegated shield, all of iron; he knew well enough that a shield of wood could not help him; lindenwood opposed to fire.... The prince

¹ Beowulf, xxii. xxiii. p. 62 et passim.
of rings was then too proud to seek the wide flier with a troop, with a large company; he feared not for himself that battle, nor did he make any account of the dragon’s war, his laboriousness and valour.” And yet he was sad, and went unwillingly, for he was “fated to abide the end.” Then “he was ware of a cavern, a mound under the earth, nigh to the sea wave, the clashing of waters, which cave was full within of embossed ornaments and wires. . . . Then the king, hard in war sat upon the promontory, whilst he, the prince of the Geats, bade farewell to his household comrades. . . . I, the old guardian of my people, seek a feud.” He “let words proceed from his breast,” the dragon came, vomiting fire; the blade bit not his body, and the king “suffered painfully, involved in fire.” His comrades had “turned to the wood, to save their lives,” all save Wiglaf, who “went through the fatal smoke,” knowing well “that it was not the old custom” to abandon relation and prince, “that he alone . . . shall suffer distress, shall sink in battle.” “The worm came furious, the foul insidious stranger, variegated with waves of fire. . . . hot and warlike fierce, he clutched the whole neck with bitter banes; he was bloodied with life-gore, the blood boiled in waves.”

They, with their swords, carved the worm in the midst. Yet the wound of the king became burning and swelled; “he soon discovered that poison boiled in his breast within, and sat by the wall upon a stone”; “he looked upon the work of giants, how the eternal cavern held within stone arches fast upon pillars.” Then he said—

“I have held this people fifty years; there was not any king of my neighbours, who dared to greet me with warriors, to oppress

1 Beowulf, xxxiii.-xxxvi. p. 94 et passim.”
me with terror. . . . I held mine own well, I sought not treacherous malice, nor swore unjustly many oaths; on account of all this, I, sick with mortal wounds, may have joy. . . . Now do thou go immediately to behold the hoard under the hoary stone, my dear Wiglaf. . . . Now, I have purchased with my death a hoard of treasures; it will be yet of advantage at the need of the people. . . . I give thanks . . . that I might before my dying day obtain such for my peoples . . . longer may I not here be.”

This is thorough and real generosity, not exaggerated and pretended, as it will be later on in the romantic imaginations of babbling clerics, mere composers of adventure. Fiction as yet is not far removed from fact: the man breathes manifest beneath the hero. Rude as the poetry is, its hero is grand; he is so, simply by his deeds. Faithful, first to his prince, then to his people, he went alone, in a strange land, to venture himself for the delivery of his fellow-men; he forgets himself in death, while thinking only that it profits others. “Each one of us,” he says in one place, “must abide the end of his present life.” Let, therefore, each do justice, if he can, before his death. Compare with him the monsters whom he destroys, the last traditions of the ancient wars against inferior races, and of the primitive religion; think of his life of danger, nights upon the waves, man grappling with the brute creation; man’s indomitable will crushing the breasts of beasts; man’s powerful muscles which, when exerted, tear the flesh of the monsters: you will see reappear through the mist of legends, and under the light of poetry, the valiant men who, amid the madness of war and the raging of their own mood, began to settle a people and to found a state.

1 Beowulf xxxvii. xxxviii. p. 110 et passim. I have throughout always used the very words of Kemble’s translation.—Tq.
V.

One poem nearly whole and two or three fragments are all that remain of this lay-poetry of England. The rest of the pagan current, German and barbarian, was arrested or overwhelmed, first by the influx of the Christian religion, then by the conquest of the Norman-French. But what remains more than suffices to show the strange and powerful poetic genius of the race, and to exhibit beforehand the flower in the bud.

If there has ever been anywhere a deep and serious poetic sentiment, it is here. They do not speak, they sing, or rather they shout. Each little verse is an acclamation, which breaks forth like a growl; their strong breasts heave with a groan of anger or enthusiasm, and a vehement or indistinct phrase or expression rises suddenly, almost in spite of them, to their lips. There is no art, no natural talent, for describing singly and in order the different parts of an object or an event. The fifty rays of light which every phenomenon emits in succession to a regular and well-directed intellect, come to them at once in a glowing and confused mass, disabling them by their force and convergence. Listen to their genuine war-chants, unchecked and violent, as became their terrible voices. To this day, at this distance of time, separated as they are by manners, speech, ten centuries, we seem to hear them still:

"The army goes forth: the birds sing, the cricket chirps, the war-weapons sound, the lance clangs against the shield. Now shineth the moon, wandering under the sky. Now arise deeds of woe, which the enmity of this people prepares to do. . . . Then in the court came the tumult of war-carnage. They seized with their hands the hollow wood of the shield. They smote through the bones of the head. The roofs of the castle resounded:···"
until Garulf fell in battle, the first of earth dwelling men, son of Guthlaf. Around him lay many brave men dying. The raven whirl’d about, dark and sombre, like a willow leaf. There was a sparkling of blades, as if all Finsburg were on fire. Never have I heard of a more worthy battle in war.”

This is the song on Athelstan’s victory at Brunanburh:

“Here Athelstan king, of earls the lord, the giver of the bracelets of the nobles, and his brother also, Edmund the ætel-ing, the Elder a lasting glory won by slaughter in battle, with the edges of swords, at Brunanburh. The wall of shields they cleaved, they hewed the noble banners: with the rest of the family, the children of Edward. . . . Pursuing, they destroyed the Scottish people and the ship-fleet. . . . The field was coloured with the warrior’s blood! After that the sun on high, . . . the greatest star! glided over the earth, God’s candle bright! till the noble creature hastened to her setting. There lay soldiers many with darts struck down, Northern men over their shields shot. So were the Scots; weary of ruddy battle, . . . The screamers of war they left behind; the raven to enjoy, the dismal kite, and the black raven with horned beak, and the hoarse toad; the eagle, afterwards to feast on the white flesh; the greedy battle-hawk, and the grey beast, the wolf in the wood.”

Here all is imagery. In their impassioned minds events are not bald, with the dry propriety of an exact description; each fits in with its pomp of sound, shape, colouring; it is almost a vision which is raised, complete, with its accompanying emotions, joy, fury, excitement. In their speech, arrows are “the serpents of Hel, shot from bows of horn;” ships are “great sea-

1 Conybeare’s Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry, 1826, Battle of Finsborough, p. 175. The complete collection of Anglo-Saxon poetry has been published by M. Grein.

2 Turner, Hist. of Anglo-Saxons, iii., book 9, ch. i. p. 245.
steeds," the sea is "a chalice of waves," the helmet is "the castle of the head:" they need an extraordinary speech to express their vehement sensations, so that after a time, in Iceland, where this kind of poetry was carried on to excess, the earlier inspiration failed, art replaced nature, the Skalds were reduced to a distorted and obscure jargon. But whatever he the imagery, here as in Iceland, though unique, it is too feeble. The poets have not satisfied their inner emotion if it is only expressed by a single word. Time after time they return to and repeat their idea. "The sun on high, the great star, God's brilliant candle, the noble creature!" Four times successively they employ the same thought, and each time under a new aspect. All its different aspects rise simultaneously before the barbarian's eyes, and each word was like a fit of the semihallucination which possessed him. Verily, in such a condition, the regularity of speech and of ideas is disturbed at every turn. The succession of thought in the visionary is not the same as in a reasoning mind. One colour induces another; from sound he passes to sound; his imagination is like a diorama of unexplained pictures. His phrases recur and change: he emits the word that comes to his lips without hesitation; he leaps over wide intervals from idea to idea. The more his mind is transported, the quicker and wider the intervals traversed. With one spring he visits the poles of his horizon, and touches in one moment objects which seemed to have the world between them. His ideas are entangled without order; without notice, abruptly, the poet will return to the idea he has quitted, and insert it in the thought to which he is giving expression. It is impossible to translate these incongruous ideas, which quite disconcert our modern style.
At times they are unintelligible. Articles, particles, everything capable of illuminating thought, of marking the connection of terms, of producing regularity of ideas, all rational and logical artifices, are neglected. Passion bellows forth like a great shapeless beast; and that is all. It rises and starts in little abrupt lines; it is the acme of barbarism. Homer's happy poetry is copiously developed, in full narrative, with rich and extended imagery. All the details of a complete picture are not too much for him; he loves to look at things, he lingers over them, rejoices in their beauty, dresses them in splendid words; he is like the Greek girls, who thought themselves ugly if they did not bedeck arms and shoulders with all the gold coins from their purse, and all the treasures from their caskets; his long verses flow by with their cadences, and spread out like a purple robe under an Ionian sun. Here the clumsy-fingered poet crowds and clashes his ideas in a narrow measure; if measure there be, he barely observes it; all his ornament is three words beginning with the same letter. His chief care is to abridge, to imprison thought in a kind of mutilated cry. The force of the internal impression, which, not knowing how to unfold itself, becomes condensed and doubled by accumulation; the harshness of the outward expression, which, subservient

1 The cleverest Anglo-Saxon scholars, Turner, Conybeare, Thorpe recognise this difficulty.

2 Turner, iii. 231, et passim. The translations in French, however literal, do injustice to the text; that language is too clear, too logical. No Frenchman can understand this extraordinary phase of intellect, except by taking a dictionary, and deciphering some pages of Anglo-Saxon for a fortnight.

3 Turner remarks that the same idea expressed by King Alfred, in prose and then in verse, takes in the first case seven words, in the second six. — History of the Anglo-Saxons, iii. 235.
to the energy and shocks of the inner sentiment, seeks
only to exhibit it intact and original, in spite of and
at the expense of all order and beauty,—such are the
characteristics of their poetry, and these also will be
the characteristics of the poetry which is to follow.

VI.

A race so constituted was predisposed to Christianity,
by its gloom, its aversion to sensual and reckless living,
its inclination for the serious and sublime. When
their sedentary habits had reconciled their souls to
a long period of ease, and weakened the fury which
fed their sanguinary religion, they readily inclined
to a new faith. The vague adoration of the great
powers of nature, which eternally fight for mutual de-
struction, and, when destroyed, rise up again to the
combat, had long since disappeared in the dim distance.
Society, on its formation, introduced the idea of peace
and the need for justice, and the war-gods faded from
the minds of men, with the passions which had created
them. A century and a half after the invasion by the
Saxons,¹ Roman missionaries, bearing a silver cross
with a picture of Christ, came in procession chanting a
litany. Presently the high priest of the Northumbrians
declared in presence of the nobles that the old gods
were powerless, and confessed that formerly "he knew
nothing of that which he adored;" and he among the
first, lance in hand, assisted to demolish their temple.
Then a chief rose in the assembly, and said:

"You remember, it may be, O king, that which sometimes
happens in winter when you are seated at table with your earls
and thanes. Your fire is lighted, and your hall warmed, and

¹ 596-625. Aug. Thierry, i. 81; Bede, xii. 2.
without rain and snow and storm. Then comes a swallow flying across the hall; he enters by one door, and leaves by another. The brief moment while he is within is pleasant to him; he feels not rain nor cheerless winter weather; but the moment is brief—the bird flies away in the twinkling of an eye, and he passes from winter to winter. Such, methinks, is the life of man on earth, compared with the uncertain time beyond. It appears for a while; but what is the time which comes after—the time which was before? We know not. If, then, this new doctrine may teach us somewhat of greater certainty, it were well that we should regard it.

This restlessness, this feeling of the infinite and dark beyond, this sober, melancholy eloquence, were the harbingers of spiritual life. We find nothing like it amongst the nations of the south, naturally pagan, and preoccupied with the present life. These utter barbarians embrace Christianity straightway, through sheer force of mood and clime. To no purpose are they brutal, heavy, shackled by infantine superstitions, capable, like King Canute, of buying for a hundred golden talents the arm of Augustine. They possess the idea of God. This grand God of the Bible, omnipotent and unique, who disappears almost entirely in the middle ages, obscured by His court and His family, endures amongst them in spite of absurd or grotesque legends. They do not blot Him out under pious romances, by the elevation of the saints, or under feminine caresses, to benefit the infant Jesus and the Virgin. Their grandeur and their severity raise them to His high level; they are not tempted, like artistic and talkative nations, to replace religion by a fair and agreeable narrative. More than any race in Europe, they approach, by the

1 Jouffroy, _Problem of Human Destiny._
2 Michelet, preface to _La Renaissance_; Didron, _Histoire de Dieu._
simplicity and energy of their conceptions, the old Hebraic spirit. Enthusiasm is their natural condition; and their new Deity fills them with admiration, as their ancient deities inspired them with fury. They have hymns, genuine odes, which are but a concrete of exclamations. They have no development; they are incapable of restraining or explaining their passion; it bursts forth, in raptures, at the vision of the Almighty. The heart alone speaks here—a strong, barbarous heart. Cædmon, their old poet,¹ says Bede, was a more ignorant man than the others, who knew no poetry; so that in the hall, when they handed him the harp, he was obliged to withdraw, being unable to sing like his companions. Once, keeping night-watch over the stable, he fell asleep. A stranger appeared to him, and asked him to sing something, and these words came into his head: "Now we ought to praise the Lord of heaven, the power of the Creator, and His skill, the deeds of the Father of glory; how He, being eternal God, is the author of all marvels; who, almighty guardian of the human race, created first for the sons of men the heavens as the roof of their dwelling, and then the earth." Remembering this when he woke,² he came to the town, and they brought him before the learned men, before the abbess Hilda, who, when they had heard him, thought that he had received a gift from heaven, and made him a monk in the abbey. There he spent his life listening to portions of Holy Writ, which were explained to him in Saxon, "ruminating over them like a pure animal, turned them into most sweet verse." Thus is true poetry born. These men pray with all the emotion of a new soul; they kneel; they adore; the less they know the more they

¹ About 630. See Codex Exoniensis, Thorpe. ² Bede, iv. 24.
think. Some one has said that the first and most sincere hymn is this one word O! Theirs were hardly longer; they only repeated time after time some deep passionate word, with monotonous vehemence. "In heaven art Thou, our aid and succour, resplendent with happiness! All things bow before thee, before the glory of Thy Spirit. With one voice they call upon Christ; they all cry: Holy, holy art thou, King of the angels of heaven, our Lord! and Thy judgments are just and great: they reign for ever and in all places, in the multitude of Thy works." We are reminded of the songs of the servants of Odin, tonsured now, and clad in the garments of monks. Their poetry is the same; they think of God, as of Odin, in a string of short, accumulated, passionate images, like a succession of lightning-flashes; the Christian hymns are a sequel to the pagan. One of them, Adhelm, stood on a bridge leading to the town where he lived, and repeated warlike and profane odes as well as religious poetry, in order to attract and instruct the men of his time. He could do it without changing his key. In one of them, a funeral song, Death speaks. It was one of the last Saxon compositions, containing a terrible Christianity, which seems at the same time to have sprung from the blackest depths of the Edda. The brief metre sounds abruptly, with measured stroke, like the passing bell. It is as if we hear the dull resounding responses which roll through the church, while the rain beats on the dim glass, and the broken clouds sail mournfully in the sky; and our eyes, glued to the pale face of a dead man, feel beforehand the horror of the damp grave into which the living are about to cast him.

"For thee was a house built ere thou wert born; for thee
was a mould shapen ere thou of thy mother camest. Its height
is not determined, nor its depth measured; nor is it closed up
 however long it may be) until I thee bring where thou shalt
remain; until I shall measure thee and the sod of the earth.
Thy house is not highly built; it is unhigh and low. When
thou art in it, the heel-ways are low, the side-ways unhigh.
The roof is built thy breast full nigh; so thou shalt in earth
dwell full cold, dim, and dark. Doorless is that house, and dark
it is within. There thou art fast detained, and Death holds the
key. Loathly is that earth-house, and grim to dwell in. There
thou shalt dwell, and worms shall share thee. Thus thou art
laid, and leavest thy friends. Thou hast no friend that will
come to thee, who will ever inquire how that house liketh thee,
who shall ever open for thee the door, and seek thee, for soon
thou becomest loathly and hateful to look upon.”

Has Jeremy Taylor a more gloomy picture? The two
religious poetries, Christian and pagan, are so like, that
one might mingle their incongruities, images, and legends.
In Beowulf, altogether pagan, the Deity appears as Odin,
more mighty and serene, and differs from the other only
as a peaceful Bretwalda. differs from an adventurous
and heroic bandit-chief. The Scandinavian monsters,
Jotuns, enemies of the Æsir, have not vanished; but
they descend from Cain, and the giants drowned by
the flood. Their new hell is nearly the ancient Nás-
strand, “a dwelling deadly cold, full of bloody eagles
and pale adders;” and the dreadful last day of judg-

1 Conybeare’s Illustrations, p. 271.
2 Bretwalda was a species of war-king, or temporary and elective
chief of all the Saxons.—Tr.
3 The Æsir (sing. As) are the gods of the Scandinavian nations, of
whom Odin was the chief.—Tr.
4 Kemble, i. i. xii. In this chapter he has collected many features
which show the endurance of the ancient mythology.
5 Nástrand is the strand or shore of the dead.—Tr.
ment, when all will crumble into dust, and make way for a purer world, resembles the final destruction of Edda, that "twilight of the gods," which will end in a victorious regeneration, an everlasting joy "under a fairer sun."

By this natural conformity they were able to make their religious poems indeed poems. Power in spiritual productions arises only from the sincerity of personal and original sentiment. If they can relate religious tragedies, it is because their soul was tragic, and in a degree biblical. They introduce into their verses, like the old prophets of Israel, their fierce vehemence, their murderous hatreds, their fanaticism, all the shudderings of their flesh and blood. One of them, whose poem is mutilated, has related the history of Judith— with what inspiration we shall see. It needed a barbarian to display in such strong light excesses, tumult, murder, vengeance, and combat.

"Then was Holofernes exhilarated with wine; in the halls of his guests he laughed and shouted, he roared and dinned. Then might the children of men afar off hear how the stern one stormed and clamoured, animated and elated with wine. He admonished amply that they should bear it well to those sitting on the bench. So was the wicked one over all the day, the lord and his men, drunk with wine, the stern dispenser of wealth; till that they swimming lay over drunk, all his nobility, as they were deathslain."

The night having arrived, he commands them to bring into his tent "the illustrious virgin;" then, going in to visit her, he falls drunk on his bed. The moment was come for "the maid of the Creator, the holy woman."

"She took the heathen man fast by his hair; she drew him by his limbs towards her disgracefully; and the mischiefful odious man at her pleasure laid; so as the wretch she might the easiest well command. She with the twisted locks struck the hateful enemy, meditating hate, with the red sword, till she had half cut off his neck; so that he lay in a swoon, drunk and mortally wounded. He was not then dead, not entirely lifeless. She struck then earnest, the woman illustrious in strength, another time the heathen hound, till that his head rolled forth upon the floor. The soul one lay without a coffar; backward his spirit turned under the abyss, and there was plunged below, with sulphur fastened; for ever afterwards wounded by worms. Bound in torments, hard imprisoned, in hell he burns. After his course he need not hope, with darkness overwhelmed, that he may escape from that mansion of worms; but there he shall remain; ever and ever, without end, henceforth in that cavern-house, void of the joys of hope."  

Has any one ever heard a stern accent of satisfied hate? When Clovis listened to the Passion play, he cried, "Why was I not there with my Franks!" So here the old warrior instinct swelled into flame over the Hebrew wars. As soon as Judith returned,

"Men under helms (went out) from the holy city at the dawn itself. They dinned shields; men roared loudly. At this rejoiced the lank wolf in the wood, and the wan raven, the fowl greedy of slaughter, both from the west, that the sons of men for them should have thought to prepare their fill on corpses. And to them flew in their paths the active devourer, the eagle, hoary in his feathers. The willowed kite, with his horned beak, sang the song of Hilda. The noble warriors proceeded, they in mail, to the battle, furnished with shields, with swelling banners. They then speedily let fly forth showers of arrows, the serpents of Hilda, from their horn bows; the spears on the

ground hard stormed. Loud raged the plunderers of battle; they sent their darts into the throng of the chieft. . . . They that awhile before the reproach of the foreigners, the taunts of the heathen endured." ¹

Amongst all these unknown poets² there is one whose name we know, Caedmon, perhaps the old Caedmon who wrote the first hymn; like him, at all events, who, paraphrasing the Bible with a barbarian's vigour and sublimity, has shown the grandeur and fury of the sentiment with which the men of these times entered into their new religion. He also sings when he speaks; when he mentions the ark, it is with a profusion of poetic names, "the floating house, the greatest of floating chambers, the wooden fortress, the moving roof, the cavern, the great sea-chest," and many more. Every time he thinks of it, he sees it with his mind, like a quick luminous vision, and each time under a new aspect, now undulating on the muddy waves, between two ridges of foam, now casting over the water its enormous shadow, black and high like a castle, "now enclosing in its cavernous sides" the endless swarm of caged beasts. Like the others, he wrestles with God in his heart; triumphs like a warrior over destruction and victory; and in relating the death of Pharaoh, can hardly speak from anger, or see, because the blood mounts to his eyes:

"The folk was affrighted, the flood-dread seized on their sad souls; ocean wailed with death, the mountain heights were with blood besteamed, the sea foamed gore, crying was in the waves, the water full of weapons, a death-mist rose; the Egyptians were turned back; trembling they fled, they felt fear: would

² Grein, *Bibliothek der Angelsächsischen poesie.*
that host gladly find their homes; their vaunt grew sadder: against them, as a cloud, rose the fall rolling of the waves; there came not any of that host to home, but from behind inclosed them fate with the wave. Where ways ere lay sea raged. Their might was merged, the streams stood, the storm rose high to heaven; the loudest army-cry the hostile uttered; the air above was thickened with dying voices. . . . Ocean raged, drew itself up on high, the storms rose, the corpses rolled.”

Is the song of the Exodus more abrupt, more vehement, or more savage? These men can speak of the creation like the Bible, because they speak of destruction like the Bible. They have only to look into their own hearts, in order to discover an emotion sufficiently strong to raise their souls to the height of their Creator. This emotion existed already in their pagan legends; and Caedmon, in order to recount the origin of things, has only to turn to the ancient dreams, such as have been preserved in the prophecies of the Edda.

“"There had not here as yet, save cavern-shade, aught been; but this wide abyss stood deep and dim, strange to its Lord, idle and useless; on which looked with his eyes the King of mind, and beheld those places void of joys; saw the dark cloud lower in eternal night, swart under heaven, dark and waste, until this worldly creation through the word existed of the Glory-King . . . The earth as yet was not green with grass; ocean cover’d, swart in eternal night, far and wide the dusky ways.”

In this manner will Milton hereafter speak, the descendant of the Hebrew seers, last of the Scandinavian seers, but assisted in the development of his thought by all the resources of Latin culture and

1 Thorpe, Caedmon, 1832. xlvi. p. 206.
2 Thorpe, Caedmon, ii. p. 7. A likeness exists between this song and corresponding portions of the Edda.
civilisation. And yet he will add nothing to the primitive sentiment. Religious instinct is not acquired; it belongs to the blood, and is inherited with it. So it is with other instincts; pride in the first place, indomitable self-conscious energy, which sets man in opposition to all domination, and inures him against all pain. Milton’s Satan exists already in Cáedmon’s, as the picture exists in the sketch; because both have their model in the race; and Cáedmon found his originals in the northern warriors, as Milton did in the Puritans:

"Why shall I for his favour serve, bend to him in such vassalage? I may be a god as he. Stand by me, strong associates, who will not fail me in the strife. Heroes stern of mood, they have chosen me for chief, renowned warriors! with such may one devise counsel, with such capture his adherents; they are my zealous friends, faithful in their thoughts; I may be their chieftain, sway in this realm; thus to me it seemeth not right that I in aught need cringe to God for any good; I will no longer be his vassal." ¹

He is overcome: shall he be subdued? He is cast into the place "where torment they suffer, burning heat intense, in midst of hell, fire and broad flames: so also the bitter seeks smoke and darkness;" will he repent? At first he is astonished, he despairs; but it is a hero’s despair.

"This narrow place is most unlike that other that we are knew, ² high in heaven’s kingdom, which my master bestowed on me. . . . Oh, had I power of my hands, and might one season

¹ Thorpe, Cáedmon, iv. p. 18.
² This is Milton’s opening also. (See Paradise Lost, Book i. verse 242, etc.) One would think that he must have had some knowledge of Cáedmon from the translation of Junius.
be without, be one winter's space, then with this host I—but around me lie iron bonds, presseth this cord of chain: I am powerless! me have so hard the clasps of hell, so firmly grasped! Here is a vast fire above and underneath, never did I see a loathlier landskip; the flame abateth not, hot over hell. Me hath the clasping of these rings, this hard-polish'd band, impeded in my course, debarr'd me from my way; my feet are bound, my hands manacled, . . . so that with aught I cannot from these limb-bonds escape.”¹

As there is nothing to be done against God, it is His new creature, man, whom he must attack. To him who has lost everything, vengeance is left; and if the conquered can enjoy this, he will find himself happy; “he will sleep softly, even under his chains.”

VII.

Here the foreign culture ceased. Beyond Christianity it could not graft upon this barbarous stock any fruitful or living branch. All the circumstances which elsewhere mellowed the wild sap, failed here. The Saxons found Britain abandoned by the Romans; they had not yielded, like their brothers on the Continent, to the ascendancy of a superior civilisation; they had not become mingled with the inhabitants of the land; they had always treated them like enemies or slaves, pursuing like wolves those who escaped to the mountains of the west, treating like beasts of burden those whom they had conquered with the land. While the Germans of Gaul, Italy, and Spain became Romans, the Saxons retained their language, their genius and manners, and created in Britain a Germany outside of Germany. A hundred and fifty years after the Saxon

¹ Thorpe, Caedmon, iv. p. 22.
invasion, the introduction of Christianity and the dawn of security attained by a society inclining to peace, gave birth to a kind of literature; and we meet with the venerable Bede, and later on, Alcuin, John Scotus Erigena, and some others, commentators, translators, teachers of barbarians, who tried not to originate but to compile, to pick out and explain from the great Greek and Latin encyclopaedia something which might suit the men of their time. But the wars with the Danes came and crushed this humble plant, which, if left to itself, would have come to nothing. When Alfred the Deliverer became king, “there were very few ecclesiastics,” he says, “on this side of the Humber, who could understand in English their own Latin prayers, or translate any Latin writing into English. On the other side of the Humber I think there were scarce any; there were so few that, in truth, I cannot remember a single man south of the Thames, when I took the kingdom, who was capable of it.” He tried, like Charlemagne, to instruct his people, and turned into Saxon for their use several works, above all some moral books, as the de Consolatione of Boethius; but this very translation bears witness to the barbarism of his audience. He adapts the text in order to bring it down to their intelligence; the pretty verses of Boethius, somewhat pretentious, laboured, elegant, crowded with classical allusions of a refined and compact style worthy

1 They themselves feel their impotence and decrepitude. Bede, dividing the history of the world into six periods, says that the fifth, which stretches from the return out of Babylon to the birth of Christ, is the senile period; the sixth is the present, *aetas decrepita, totius morte secundis consummata.*

2 Died 901; Adhelm died 709, Bede died 735, Alcuin lived under Charlemagne, Erigena under Charles the Bald (848–677).
of Seneca, become an artless, long drawn out and yet desultory prose, like a nurse's fairy tale, explaining ever, thing, recommencing and breaking off its phrases, making ten turns about a single detail; so low was it necessary to stoop to the level of this new intelligence, which had never thought or known anything. Here follows the Latin of Boethius, so affected, so pretty, with the English translation affixed:—

"Quondam funera conjugis
Vates Threicius gemens,
Postquam flegibilus modis
Silvas currere, mobiles
Amnes stare coegerat,
Junxitque intrepidum latus
Sævis cerva leonibus,
Nec visum timuit lepus
Jam cantu placidum canem;
Cum flagrantior intima
Fervor pectoris ureret,
Nec qui cuncta subegerant
Mulcerent dominum modi;
Inmites superos querens,
Infernæ adiit domos.
Illic blanda sonantibus
Chordis carmina temperans,
Quidquid praecipius Deæ
Matris fontibus hauserat,
Quod lactus dabat impotens,
Quod lactum geminae amor,
Deslet Tartara commovens,
Et dulci venian prece
Umbrarum dominos rogat,
Stupet tergeminus novo
Captus carmine janitor;

"It happened formerly that there was a harper in the country called Thrace, which was in Greece. The harper was inconceivably good. His name was Orpheus: he had a very excellent wife, called Eurydice. Then began men to say concerning the harper, that he could harp so that the wood moved, and the stones stirred themselves at the sound, and wild beasts would run there-to, and stand as if they were tame; so still, that though men or hounds pursued them, they shunned them not. Then said they, that the harper's wife should die, and her soul should be led to hell. Then should the harper become so sorrowful that he could not remain among the men, but frequented the wood, and sat on the mountains, both day and night, weeping and harping, so that the woods shook, and the rivers stood still, and no hart shunned any lion, nor
Quae sorte agitant metu
Ultrices scelerum Deco
Jam maestae lacrymis madent.
Non Ixionium caput
Velox præcipitat rota,
Et longa ista perditus
Spernit flumina Tantalus.
Vultur dum satur est modis
Non traxit Tityus iecur.
Tandem, vincimur, arbiter
Umbrarum miserans ait.
Donemus comitem viro,
Emptam carmine conjugen.
Sed lex dona coercet,
Nec, dum Tartara liquerit,
Fas sit lumina flectere.
Quis legem det amantibus?
Major lex fit amor sibi.
Heu ! noctis prope terminos
Orpheus Eurydicem suam
Vidit, perdit, occidit.
Vos haec fabula repsectit,
Quicunque in superum diem
Mentem ducere queritis.
Nam qui tartareum in specus
Victus lumina flexerit,
Quidquid præcipuum trahit
Perdit, dum videt inferos.”

Book III. Metre 12.
king: and all began to speak with him, and to pray that which he prayed. And the restless wheel which Ixion, the king of the Lapithae, was bound to for his guilt, that stood still for his harping. And Tantalus the king, who in this world was immoderately greedy, and whom that same vice of greediness followed there, he became quiet. And the vulture should cease, so that he tore not the liver of Tityus the king, which before therewith tormented him. And all the punishments of the inhabitants of hell were suspended, whilst he harped before the king. When he long and long had harped, then spoke the king of the inhabitants of hell, and said, Let us give the man his wife, for he has earned her by his harping. He then commanded him that he should well observe that he never looked backwards after he departed thence; and said, if he looked backwards, that he should lose the woman. But men can with great difficulty, if at all, restrain love! Wellaway! What! Orpheus then led his wife with him till he came to the boundary of light and darkness. Then went his wife after him. When he came forth into the light, then looked he behind his back towards the woman. Then was she immediately lost to him. This fable teaches every man who desires to fly the darkness of hell, and to come to the light of the true good, that he look not about him to his old vices, so that he practise them again as fully as he did before. For whosoever with full will turns his mind to the vices which he had before forsaken, and practises them, and they then fully please him, and he never thinks of forsaking them; then loses he all his former good unless he again amend it."\(^1\)

A man speaks thus when he wishes to impress upon the mind of his hearers an idea which is not clear to them. Boethius had for his audience senators, men of culture, who understood as well as we the slightest mythological allusion. Alfred is obliged to take them

\(^{1}\) Fox's *Alfred's Boethius*, chap. 35. § 6, 1864.
up and develop them, like a father or a master, who
draws his little boy between his knees, and relates to
him names, qualities, crimes and their punishments,
which the Latin only hints at. But the ignorance is
such that the teacher himself needs correction. He
takes the Parce for the Erinyes, and gives Charon
three heads like Cerberus. There is no adornment in
his version; no delicacy as in the original. Alfred has
hard work to make himself understood. What, for
instance, becomes of the noble Platonic moral, the apt
interpretation after the style of Iamblichus and Por-
phyry? It is altogether dulled. He has to call
everything by its name, and turn the eyes of his people
to tangible and visible things. It is a sermon suited
to his audience of Thanes; the Danes whom he had
converted by the sword needed a clear moral. If he
had translated for them exactly the last words of Boe-
thius, they would have opened wide their big stupid
eyes and fallen asleep.

For the whole talent of an uncultivated mind lies in
the force and oneness of its sensations. Beyond that it
is powerless. The art of thinking and reasoning lies
above it. These men lost all genius when they lost their
fever-heat. They lisped awkwardly and heavily dry
chronicles, a sort of historical almanacks. You might
think them peasants, who, returning from their toil, came
and scribbled with chalk on a smoky table the date of a
year of scarcity, the price of corn, the changes in the
weather, a death. Even so, side by side with the meagre
Bible chronicles, which set down the successions of kings,
and of Jewish massacres, are exhibited the exaltation of
the psalms and the transports of prophecy. The same
lyric poet can be alternately a brute and a genius, because
his genius comes and goes like a disease, and instead of having it he simply is ruled by it.

"A. D. 611. This year Cynewulf succeeded to the government in Wessex, and held it one-and-thirty winters. Cynewulf was the son of Ceol, Ceol of Cutha, Cutha of Cynric.

"614. This year Cynewulf and Cynric fought at Bampton, and slew two thousand and forty-six of the Welsh.

"678. This year appeared the comet-star in August, and shone every morning during three months like a sunbeam. Bishop Wilfrid being driven from his bishopric by King Everth, two bishops were consecrated in his stead.

"901. This year died Alfred, the son of Ethelwulf, six nights before the mass of All Saints. He was king over all the English nation, except that part that was under the power of the Danes. He held the government one year and a half less than thirty winters; and then Edward his son took to the government.

"902. This year there was the great fight at the Holme, between the men of Kent and the Danes.

"1077. This year were reconciled the King of the Franks, and William, King of England. But it continued only a little while. This year was London burned, one night before the Assumption of St. Mary, so terribly as it never was before since it was built."¹

It is thus the poor monks speak, with monotonous dryness, who after Alfred’s time gather up and take note of great visible events; sparsely scattered we find a few moral reflections, a passionate emotion, nothing more. In the tenth century we see King Edgar give a manor to a bishop, on condition that he will put into Saxon the monastic regulation written in Latin by Saint Benedict. Alfred himself was almost the last man of culture; he, like Charlemagne, became so only by dint of deter-

¹ All these extracts are taken from Ingram’s Saxon Chronicle, 1828.
mination and patience. In vain the great spirits of this age endeavor to link themselves to the relics of the fine, ancient civilization, and to raise themselves above the chaotic and muddy ignorance in which the others flounder. They rise almost alone, and on their death the rest sink again into the mire. It is the human beast that remains master; the mind cannot find a place amidst the outbursts and the desires of the flesh, gluttony and brute force. Even in the little circle where he moves, his labour comes to nought. The model which he proposed to himself oppresses and enchains him in a cramping imitation; he aspires but to be a good copyist; he produces a gathering of centos which he calls Latin verses; he applies himself to the discovery of expressions, sanctioned by good models; he succeeds only in elaborating an emphatic, spoiled Latin, bristling with incongruities. In place of ideas, the most profound amongst them serve up the defunct doctrines of defunct authors. They compile religious manuals and philosophical manuals from the Fathers. Erigena, the most learned, goes to the extent of reproducing the old complicated dreams of Alexandrian metaphysics. How far these speculations and reminiscences soar above the barbarous crowd which howls and bustles in the depths below, no words can express. There was a certain king of Kent in the seventh century who could not write. Imagine bachelors of theology discussing before an audience of waggoners, not Parisian waggoners, but such as survive in Auvergne or in the Vosges. Among these clerks, who think like studious scholars in accordance with their favourite authors, and are doubly separated from the world as scholars and monks, Alfred alone, by his position as a layman and a practical man, descends in
his Saxon translations and his Saxon verses to the common level; and we have seen that his effort, like that of Charlemagne, was fruitless. There was an impassable wall between the old learned literature and the present chaotic barbarism. Incapable, yet compelled, to fit into the ancient mould, they gave it a twist. Unable to reproduce ideas, they reproduced a metre. They tried to eclipse their rivals in versification by the refinement of their composition, and the prestige of a difficulty overcome. So, in our own colleges, the good scholars imitate the clever divisions and symmetry of Claudian rather than the ease and variety of Virgil. They put their feet in irons, and showed their smartness by running in shackles; they weighted themselves with rules of modern rhyme and rules of ancient metre; they added the necessity of beginning each verse with the same letter that began the last. A few, like Adhelm, wrote square acrostics, in which the first line, repeated at the end, was found also to the left and right of the piece. Thus made up of the first and last letters of each verse, it forms a border to the whole piece, and the morsel of verse is like a piece of tapestry. Strange literary tricks, which changed the poet into an artisan. They bear witness to the difficulties which then impeded culture and nature, and spoiled at once the Latin form and the Saxon genius.

Beyond this barrier, which drew an impassable line between civilisation and barbarism, there was another, no less impassable, between the Latin and Saxon genius. The strong German imagination, in which glowing and obscure visions suddenly meet and abruptly overflow, was in contrast with the reasoning spirit, in which ideas gather and are developed only in a regular order; so
that if the barbarian, in his classical attempts, retained any part of his primitive instincts, he succeeded only in producing a grotesque and frightful monster. One of them this very Adhelm, a relative of King Ina, who sang on the town-bridge profane and sacred hymns alternately, too much imbued with Saxon poesy, simply to imitate the antique models, adorned his Latin prose and verse with all the "English magnificence." You might compare him to a barbarian who seizes a flute from the skilled hands of a player of Augustus' court, in order to blow on it with inflated lungs, as if it were the bellowing horn of an aurochs. The sober speech of the Roman orators and senators becomes in his hands full of exaggerated and incoherent images; he violently connects words, uniting them in a sudden and extravagant manner; he heaps up his colours, and utters extraordinary and unintelligible nonsense, like that of the later Skalds; in short, he is a latinised Skald, dragging into his new tongue the ornaments of Scandinavian poetry, such as alliteration, by dint of which he congregates in one of his epistles fifteen consecutive words, all beginning with the same letter; and in order to make up his fifteen, he introduces a barbarous Graecism amongst the Latin words. Amongst the others, the writers of legends, you will meet many times with deformation of Latin, distorted by the outburst of a too vivid imagination; it breaks out even in their scholastic and scientific writing. Here is part of a dialogue between Alcuin and prince Pepin, a son of Charlemagne,

1 William of Malmesbury's expression.

2 Primitus (pactorum procerum prestorumque pio potissimum paternoque præsidentem privilegio) panegyricum poemataque passim proestor sub polo promulgantes, stridula vocum symphonia ac melodie cantilia, naseque carmine modulaturi hymnissemus.
and he uses like formulas the little poetic and bold phrases which abound in the national poetry. "What is winter? the banishment of summer. What is spring? the painter of the earth. What is the year? the world's chariot. What is the sun? the splendour of the world, the beauty of heaven, the grace of nature, the honour of day, the distributor of the hours. What is the sea? the path of audacity, the boundary of the earth, the receptacle of the rivers, the fountain of showers." More, he ends his instructions with enigmas, in the spirit of the Skalds, such as we still find in the old manuscripts with the barbarian songs. It was the last feature of the national genius, which, when it labours to understand a matter, neglects dry, clear, consecutive deduction, to employ grotesque, remote, oft repeated imagery, and replaces analysis by intuition.

VIII.

Such was this race, the last born of the sister races, which, in the decay of the other two, the Latin and the Greek, brings to the world a new civilisation, with a new character and genius. Inferior to these in many respects, it surpasses them in not a few. Amidst the woods and mire and snows, under a sad, inclement sky, gross instincts have gained the day during this long barbarism. The German has not acquired gay humour, unrestrained facility, the feeling for harmonious beauty; his great phlegmatic body continues savage and stiff, greedy and brutal; his rude and unpliant mind is still inclined to savagery, and restive under culture. Dull and congealed, his ideas cannot expand with facility and freedom, with a natural sequence and an instinctive regularity. But this spirit, void of the
sentiment of the beautiful, is all the more apt for the sentiment of the true. The deep and incisive impression which he receives from contact with objects, and which as yet he can only express by a cry, will afterwards liberate him from the Latin rhetoric, and will vent itself on things rather than on words. Moreover, under the constraint of climate and solitude, by the habit of resistance and effort, his ideal is changed. Manly and moral instincts have gained the empire over him; and amongst them the need of independence, the disposition for serious and strict manners, the inclination for devotion and veneration, the worship of heroism. Here are the foundations and the elements of a civilisation, slower but sounder, less careful of what is agreeable and elegant, more based on justice and truth.\(^1\) Hitherto at least the race is intact, intact in its primitive coarseness; the Roman cultivation could neither develop nor deform it. If Christianity took root, it was owing to natural affinities, but it produced no change in the native genius. Now approaches a new conquest, which is to bring this time men, as well as ideas. The Saxons, meanwhile, after the wont of German races, vigorous and fertile, have within the past six centuries multiplied enormously. They were now about two millions, and the Norman army numbered sixty thousand.\(^2\) In vain

\(^1\) In Iceland, the country of the fiercest sea-kings, crimes are unknown; prisons have been turned to other uses; fines are the only punishment.

\(^2\) Following Doomsday Book, Mr. Turner reckons at three hundred thousand the heads of families mentioned. If each family consisted of five persons, that would make one million five hundred thousand people. He adds five hundred thousand for the four northern counties, for London and several large towns, for the monks and provincial clergy not enumerated. . . . We must accept these figures with caution. Still
these Normans become transformed, gallicised; by their origin, and substantially in themselves they are still the relatives of those whom they conquered. In vain they imported their manners and their poesy, and introduced into the language a third part of its words; this language continues altogether German in element and in substance. Though the grammar changed, it changed integrally, by an internal action, in the same sense as its continental cognates. At the end of three hundred years the conquerors themselves were conquered; their speech became English; and owing to frequent intermarriage, the English blood ended by gaining the predominance over the Norman blood in their veins. The race finally remains Saxon. If the old poetic genius disappears after the Conquest, it is as a river disappears and flows for a while underground. In five centuries it will emerge once more.

they agree with those of Mackintosh, George Chalmers, and several others. Many facts show that the Saxon population was very numerous and quite out of proportion to the Norman population.