

THE CONQUEST

OF THE

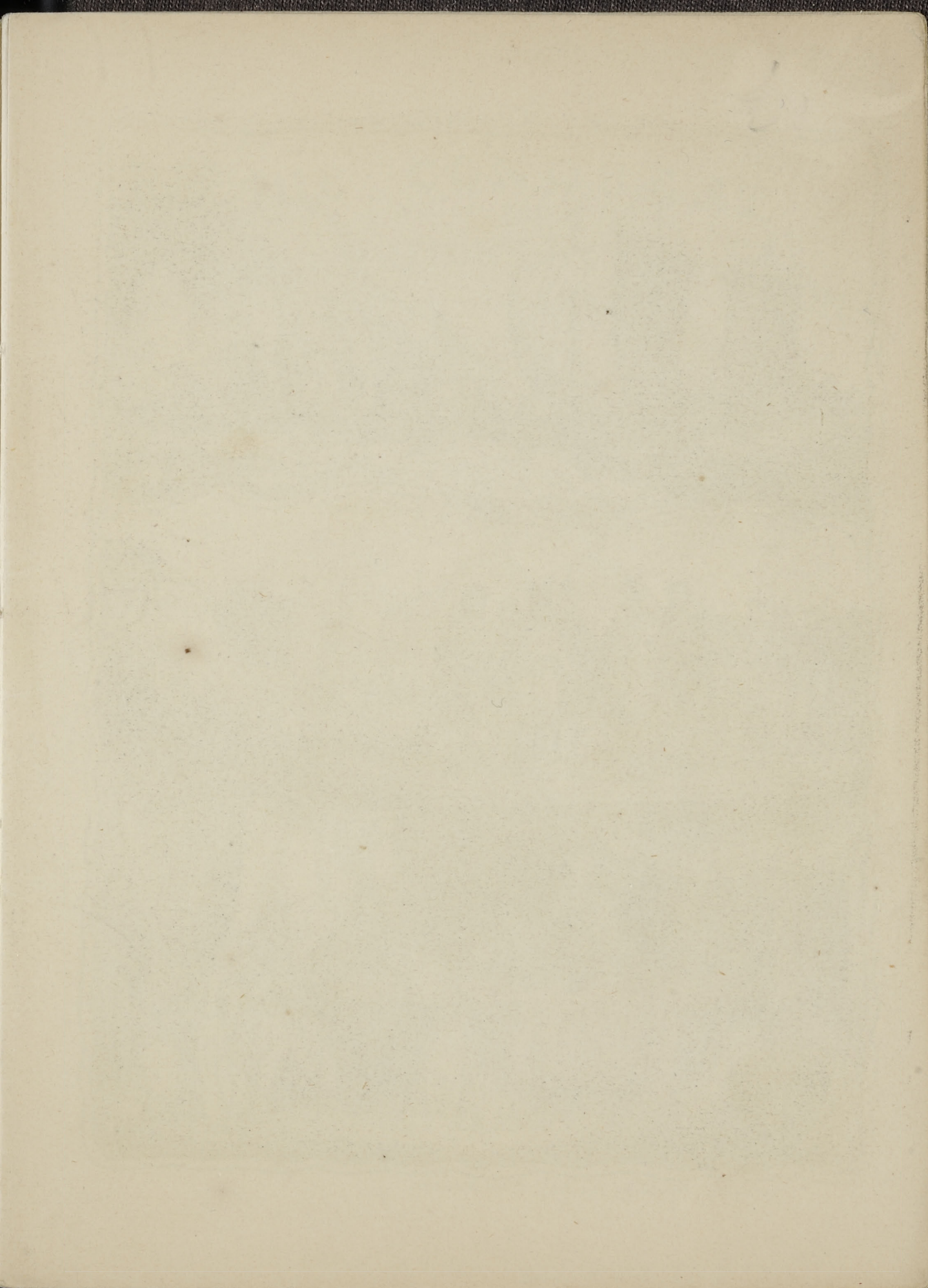
ROMANS & BRITONS

BY THE SAXONS.

BY MISS CORNER.

PRICE SIXPENCE







Sea Kings or Saxon pirates plundering on the British Coast



Vortigern sends to Hengist & Horsa



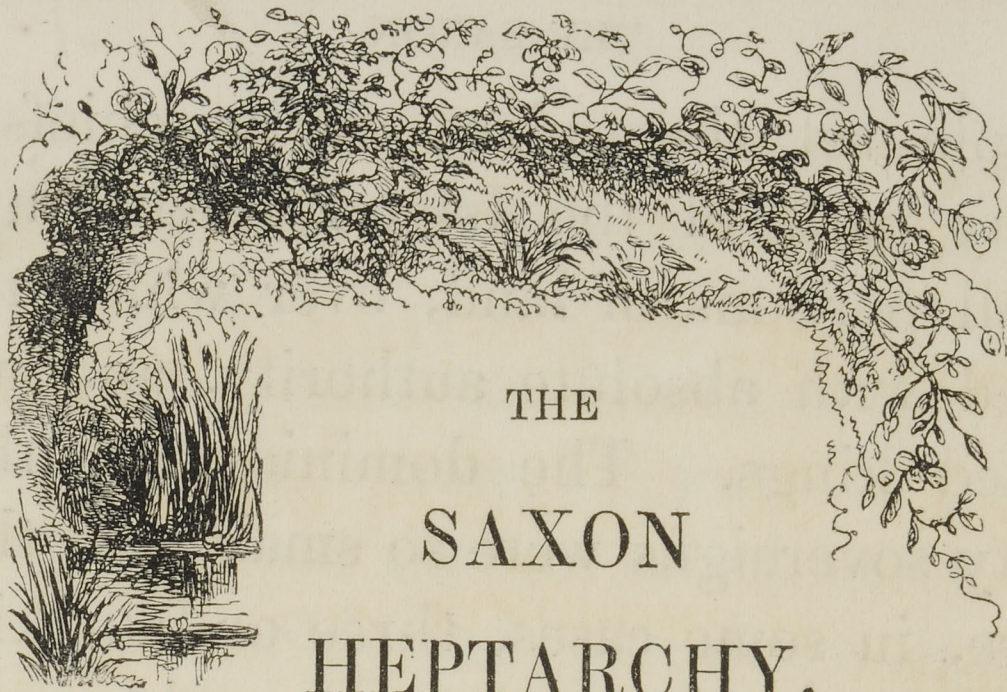
Vortigern receiving the Cup from Rowena

AN INTERESTING NARRATIVE OF
THE CONQUEST
OF THE
ROMANS & BRITONS BY THE SAXONS
AND AN ACCOUNT OF
THE HEPTARCHY,
OF
SEVEN SAXON KINGDOMS IN ENGLAND
BY MISS CORNER

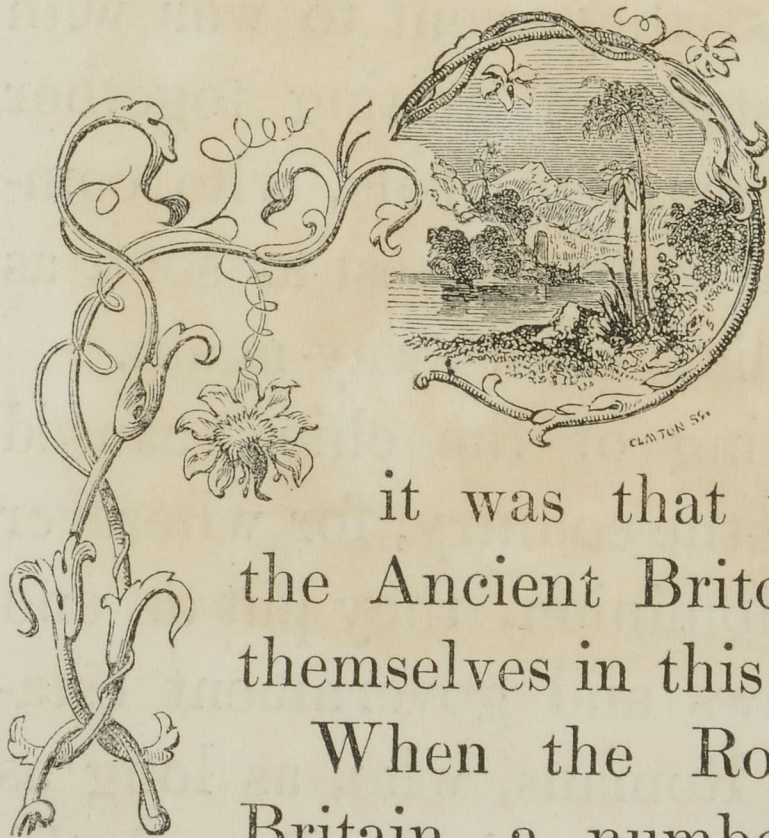


Saxon Lords & Ancient British serfs
IN EASY LANGUAGE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN.

LONDON:
THOMAS DEAN AND SON,
THREADNEEDLE STREET



THE
SAXON
HEPTARCHY.



I AM now going to tell you about the Saxons, and how

it was that they conquered the Ancient Britons, and settled themselves in this country.

When the Romans had left Britain, a number of ambitious

people set themselves up as chiefs in many parts of the Island, seizing upon small portions of land, over which they ruled with absolute authority, and were called kings. The dominions of these petty sovereigns were so small that there were, in some cases, three or four kings in the space of one county; and to secure their little kingdoms, or to make them into larger ones, they went to war with each other, instead of uniting together to expel the Picts and Scots, who commenced their invasions almost as soon as the Roman soldiers went away again.

The quarrelling of the chiefs caused great distress in the country, for wherever they obtained dominion, they put an end to the good laws and government established by the Romans, who, as long as they ruled in Britain, had allowed the

people of the chief towns and cities to choose their own magistrates, much as they do now.

But the rights and liberties they had then possessed were all lost in the sad strife for power that prevailed, and a stop was put to trade and agriculture, since no merchandize could be sent with safety from one district to another; nor would the farmers plough or sow their land, while they were in fear that an enemy might reap the harvest.

The consequences of this state of things were grievous; for besides the terrible destruction of life by fighting, great numbers of people died of want and sickness, for warfare is sure to produce famine and pestilence in every country.

Another misfortune was, that the people themselves were divided into two par-

ties, unfriendly to each other. One was called the Roman party, and consisted of thousands of Roman citizens, who were settled here on their own estates, with all the native families who were connected with them by marriage, or friendship, or trade; the other was called the British party, and was composed of Britons, who were not bound by any social ties to the Romans, or perhaps looked upon them with dislike. Each elected a king, the Romans choosing Aurelius Ambrosius, a descendant of one of the Roman emperors; the Britons placing at their head, a chief named Vortigern, who, to overpower his rival, as well as to drive away the Picts and Scots, applied for aid to the Saxons.

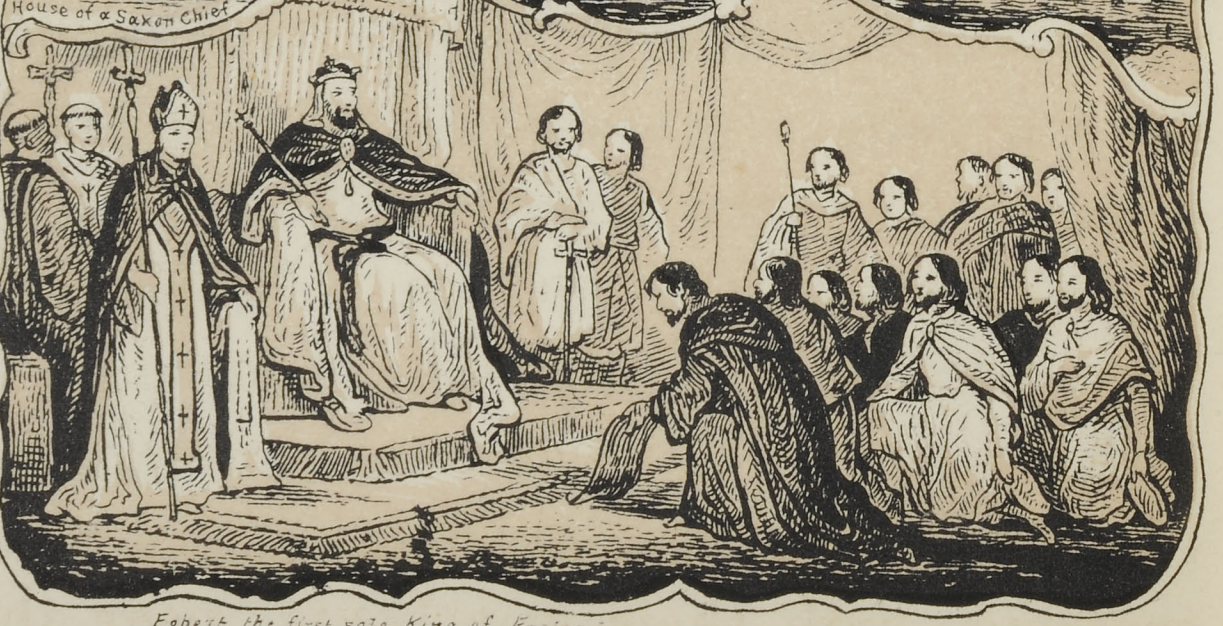
Now these Saxons were a fighting, half civilized people, who came from the north



Britons bought & sold



House of a Saxon Chief



Egbert the first sole King of England

HEPTARCHY.

of Germany, and parts of Holland and Denmark; and there were two other nations joined with them, called Jutes and Angles. Many of their chiefs were great pirates, or sea robbers; but piracy was not in those times considered as robbery, nor was killing men thought murder, although it really is so; but plundering merchants at sea by seizing their ships and cargoes, and even taking the lives of the crews, if they resisted, was regarded by the pirates as a brave and noble way of obtaining wealth. Each pirate chief had as many keels or war boats as he could get together; and each vessel contained from about twenty to forty men, with stores of provisions and arms.

Among these adventurers were two brothers, Hengist and Horsa, who were cruising, with their war boats, near the

British coast at the time when Vortigern was made king; so he sent to ask their assistance, which they readily promised; and thus the Saxons became allies of the Britons. The Isle of Thanet, where Margate now stands, then really an island, was given to them for their services.

The Saxons were well furnished with arms, such as bows and arrows, clubs spiked with iron, swords and spears of steel, and ponderous weapons, like sledge hammers, that would smash in the strongest iron helmet at a blow.

Hengist and Horsa, with their warlike bands, soon drove the Picts and Scots out of the country, and as they returned from this victory, they invited King Vortigern to a feast, at which, we are told, he was so charmed with the grace and beauty of a Saxon maiden, Rowena, the daughter of

HEPTARCHY.

Hengist, as she knelt to present him with a cup of wine, that he married her, and it is said, made her father king of Kent.

However that might have been, the Saxons were so well pleased with the country, that they began to make conquests for themselves. They fortified the Isle of Thanet, and were joined by other Saxon tribes, chiefly the people of Jutland, called Jutes and Angles, from the latter of whom this country derived the name of Anglia, or England.

The new settlers soon turned their arms against the Britons, and took possession of all Kent, where Eric, the son of Hengist, assumed the title of king. This was the first of the seven kingdoms established by the Saxons, and called the Heptarchy, because that word means a government consisting of seven parts.

THE SAXON

Soon afterwards, Ella, another Saxon chief, landed an army of pirates in Sussex, where he defeated the Britons, and drove them into the vast forests that then existed in that part of the country.

Several of the British princes now forgot their quarrels, and united their forces to repel this invasion; but Ella subdued them, and won a large tract of land along the coast, which he formed into the kingdom of Sussex, or South Saxons.

In this manner, the whole of England was gradually conquered by different Saxon chiefs, and the seven kingdoms were, one by one, established; but the wars lasted for upwards of a hundred and fifty years, for the Britons made a brave resistance, and many songs were sung and tales told by the bards or minstrels, of the valiant deeds of King Arthur and

other British heroes, said to have distinguished themselves during those times.

The Saxons, at that period, understood few arts, excepting those connected with war or piracy; therefore, they set but little value on the elegant buildings, beautiful gardens, and other works with which the Romans and Britons had adorned the country. These, with the Christian churches, were nearly all destroyed during the long wars, and many of the cities laid in ruins.

By the time the conquest was completed, very few of the Britons were remaining alive, except in the interior of the country, where they most likely were treated as slaves, and associated with the Saxon thralls, who were slaves. On all the sea coasts of the country, they were either killed in the wars, or obliged to

flee for refuge to the mountains of Wales, and to that part of France which, from them, took the name of Brittany.

Thus the race of ancient Britons, as a separate people, became extinct, and the country was peopled by the Saxons, from whom the greater part of the present population of England is descended.

The seven kingdoms of the Heptarchy were Kent, Sussex, Essex, East Anglia, Northumbria, Wessex, and Mercia. There was a king of each, but one of them was superior to the rest, and bore the title of Bretwalda, or ruler of Britain, because he had some slight degree of authority over the whole country.

Ethelbert, King of Kent, the third Bretwalda, is celebrated as having been the first Saxon monarch who adopted the Christian faith. About the year 597,

he was converted by a missionary, called St. Augustin, sent from Rome, with forty monks, to preach Christianity in Britain, as we now send out missionaries to convert heathen nations. Before those good men came, the worship of idols was much practised by the Saxons; but from that time, the Christian religion spread, by degrees, among the Saxons; and monasteries and churches were again raised in various parts of the country, the churches being generally built of wood.

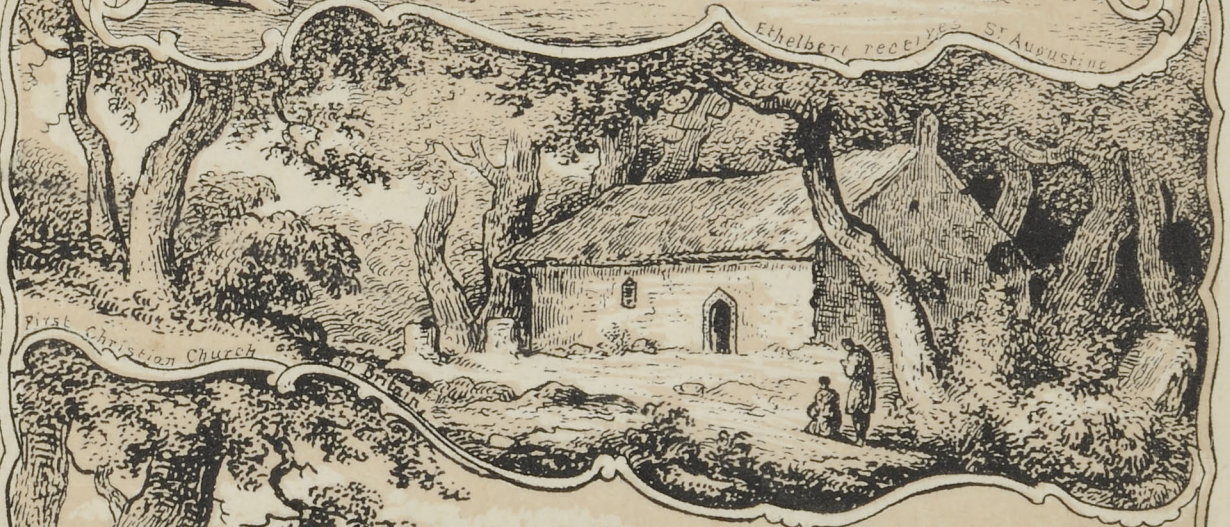
Then many learned men, and men of various talents, came from Italy and France, to settle in Britain, by whom the Saxons were much improved in the knowledge of useful arts, and thus they gradually became more civilized. Ethelbert created the first Bishop of London, and founded St. Paul's Cathedral, on the

spot where once stood the magnificent Roman temple of Diana. The present St. Paul's stands in the same place.

The Saxons brought the Feudal system into Britain; that is, the land was divided among the thanes, or nobles, and cultivated by the mass of the people, who were not free, as the people are now, but were bondsmen of the different lords, some being vassals, and others thralls, or slaves. The vassals, who were called Ceorls, or Churls, were the tenants of their lord, and paid him rent in kind; that is, sent him at stated periods, instead of money, a certain quantity of corn, hay, honey, (then used instead of sugar) cloth, which was spun and woven by the women; or other produce of their farms, besides working on his land so many days in the year. In return for these services,



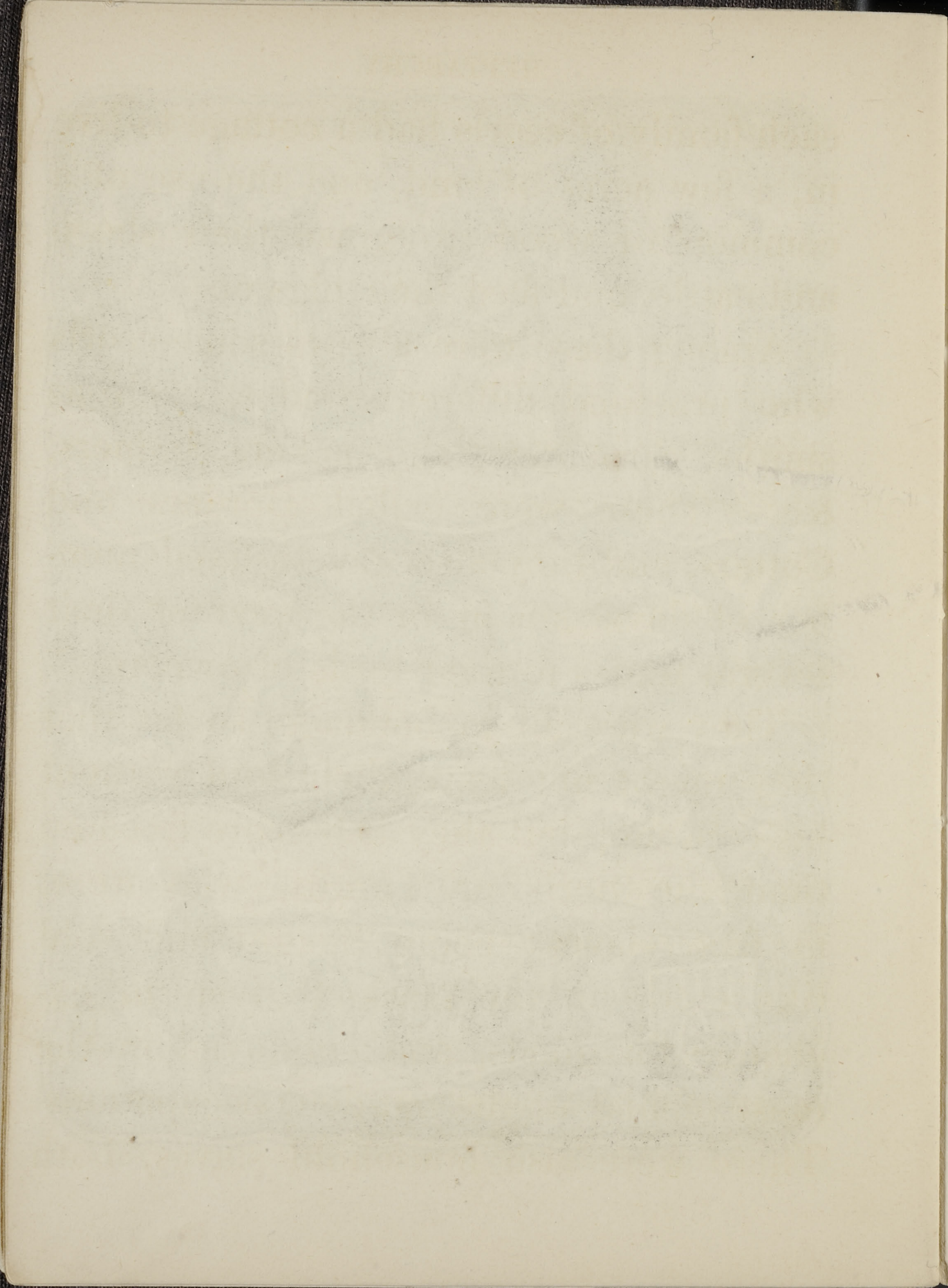
Ethelbert receives St. Augustine



First Christian Church in Britain



Ancient Britons working for their Saxon Lord



each family of ceorls had a cottage to live in, a few acres of land, and the use of a common or wood, to graze their sheep and cattle, and feed their pigs on.

Among these were always some ceorls who practised different trades, such as smiths, carpenters, shoemakers, tanners, &c. These were called Bordars and Cottars, and they also gave a fixed number of days' labour in the year at their several trades to their lords or owners.

They were all in bondage, so far that they might not leave their lord without his consent; but they had more freedom than the Serfs or Thralls, who were, in fact, slaves; being bought and sold like cattle in the market, given in exchange for goods, and employed in the most menial of the out-door occupations. There were also household slaves, both

male and female, who performed the duties of servants of all kinds.

The house of a Saxon chief was like a large barn, two stories high, the ground floor being divided into kitchens, stores, and stables; the upper story containing the hall, and other rooms for the family. The lower part was generally built of rough stones; the upper part of timber, with a thatched roof, and a wooden staircase outside. The house always stood on a piece of land surrounded by a ditch and a wall of earth, which enclosed the huts of the thralls, and the corn, hay, cattle, horses, &c. Close by, was the village, where dwelt the vassals and cottars belonging to the estate.

Rough in appearance as the exterior of a Saxon chief's dwelling must have been, the interior sometimes possessed comforts

and embellishments, according to the notions of people in those rude times. Embroidered hangings, called tapestry, the work of Saxon maidens, lined the walls of some of the rooms; there were heavy carved tables and chairs in a few of the apartments; and as glass was not then used, brightly polished metal mirrors reflected the guests frequently assembled in the hall. Speaking of the few comforts of that time, the absence of chimneys, strikes us, perhaps, as the greatest contrast to the comfort of modern dwellings, when we picture to ourselves the smoke from the fire of our richest Saxon forefathers escaping through a hole in the roof, which was closed, to keep out the cold when the fire was not wanted.

The kingdoms of the Heptarchy were frequently at war with each other, till at

length Egbert, a king of Wessex, by the success of his arms, obtained so great a degree of authority over all the seven states, that he is usually called the first sole monarch of this country, to which he gave the name of England, meaning Land of the Angles, or Anglo Saxons. This was in the early part of the ninth century; and thus ended the Heptarchy, about three hundred and seventy-six years after the landing of Hengist and Horsa.

From that time to the Norman conquest, which was two hundred and forty years afterwards, England was ruled (except for a short time,) by a succession of Saxon sovereigns, the best of whom was Alfred the Great, whose life and actions will be related in the next part of our History.

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