

sive progress through the land ; multitudes were baptized, pagan temples were gradually converted into Christian sanctuaries, and numerous flourishing churches were planted and supported.

The situation of Britain was favourable to her repose, amidst the persecutions which frequently raged on the continent ; but at length, under Dioclesian, the tenth and most sanguinary persecution of Christianity took place, and extended itself to England, when many British Christians received the crown of martyrdom.

In the reign of the next Emperor, Constantius, Christianity was openly protected throughout the empire, and British Christians were not backward in availing themselves of the privilege, and endeavouring to extend the knowledge of the truth. They and their descendants preserved also that truth in its purity, and adorned the gospel by their spirit and conduct, long after its doctrines were corrupted, and its practice degraded, at Rome and over the greater part of the continent of Europe.

In the fifth century the Britons, being invaded and harassed by the Picts and Scots, and having sought in vain the aid of the Romans, invited the Saxons to assist them against these formidable enemies. They came, but soon subjugated the country to themselves. From their arrival in 449, a check was put to the progress of the gospel, which continued to decline for nearly a century and a half, its adherents retiring before their idolatrous conquerors into the mountains of Wales or of Scotland, or into Cornwall and the country north of the Humber. Here the Christian religion continued to exist, and there is reason to believe that something beyond outward profession was to be found in those secluded districts. Monkish writers have reproached the Britons for allowing

their invaders to remain in heathen darkness ; but, as Warner observes, " What were their opportunities, and how were they to engage the attention of men who drove them like sheep to the slaughter, or into the woods and mountains ? " In this state of things it was that Gregory I., bishop of Rome, towards the close of the sixth century, sent his famous mission into England. The papacy had not then become an absolutely secular and cruel dominion ; although in many points it was much corrupted, yet there is reason to believe that this measure originated in sincere piety, and Christian benevolence. It was the effect of much serious deliberation. Even before his consecration, Gregory, walking one day in the forum, saw some very handsome youths exposed to sale. Inquiring of what country they were, he was informed they were of the Island of Britain ; and, after much conversation respecting them, and finding that they were heathens, he felt so much interested in them and their country that he entreated the then Roman Bishop to send a mission to the Island, offering himself as one ready for the task. Nothing but the officious benevolence of the Roman citizens prevented the work at that time, Gregory being too much beloved at Rome to be allowed to leave it. After his elevation to the bishopric he ordered some young Saxons to be instructed in Christianity, to prepare them for the mission ; and in the year 597, he sent a number of Monks, at the head of whom was one Augustine, to convert the English. In obedience to Gregory's directions, they proceeded on their journey ; but their hearts failed them, and they sent Augustine back to obtain their release from the service. The prelate advised them to resume their labours in confidence of Divine aid. He procured for them all the assistance in France that might expedite their passage into Britain, and furnished them with every con-