

various circumstances which have formed the environment, for instance, of the British nation, and to say generally that they have made it what it is. The races which have successively come to inhabit this island had each its own characteristics, its inheritance of ideas or institutions. Our climate and the nature of our mineral wealth, our insularity, our position on the globe, have all been potent elements in forming the England of to-day. But how potent has each item of our environment been? This is a question which we cannot attempt to answer, and the impossibility is brought home to us if we try to picture the effect had any of the conditions been altered. What if the Norman Conquest had not come just when the ground had been prepared for it by the Danish kings? What if the Reformation had not come when a virtual despotism had supplanted the old feudal régime? What if Cromwell had lived to old age? It is reasonable to say that the germs of our institutions were brought hither by the Angle and Saxon invaders, and to argue that their development into their present form was due to certain conditions, in the absence of which the germs would have perished or grown up very differently. Even so we cannot affirm that no other influences were at work. Our evidence cannot be conclusive, however good it may be as the basis for theories avowedly conjectural.